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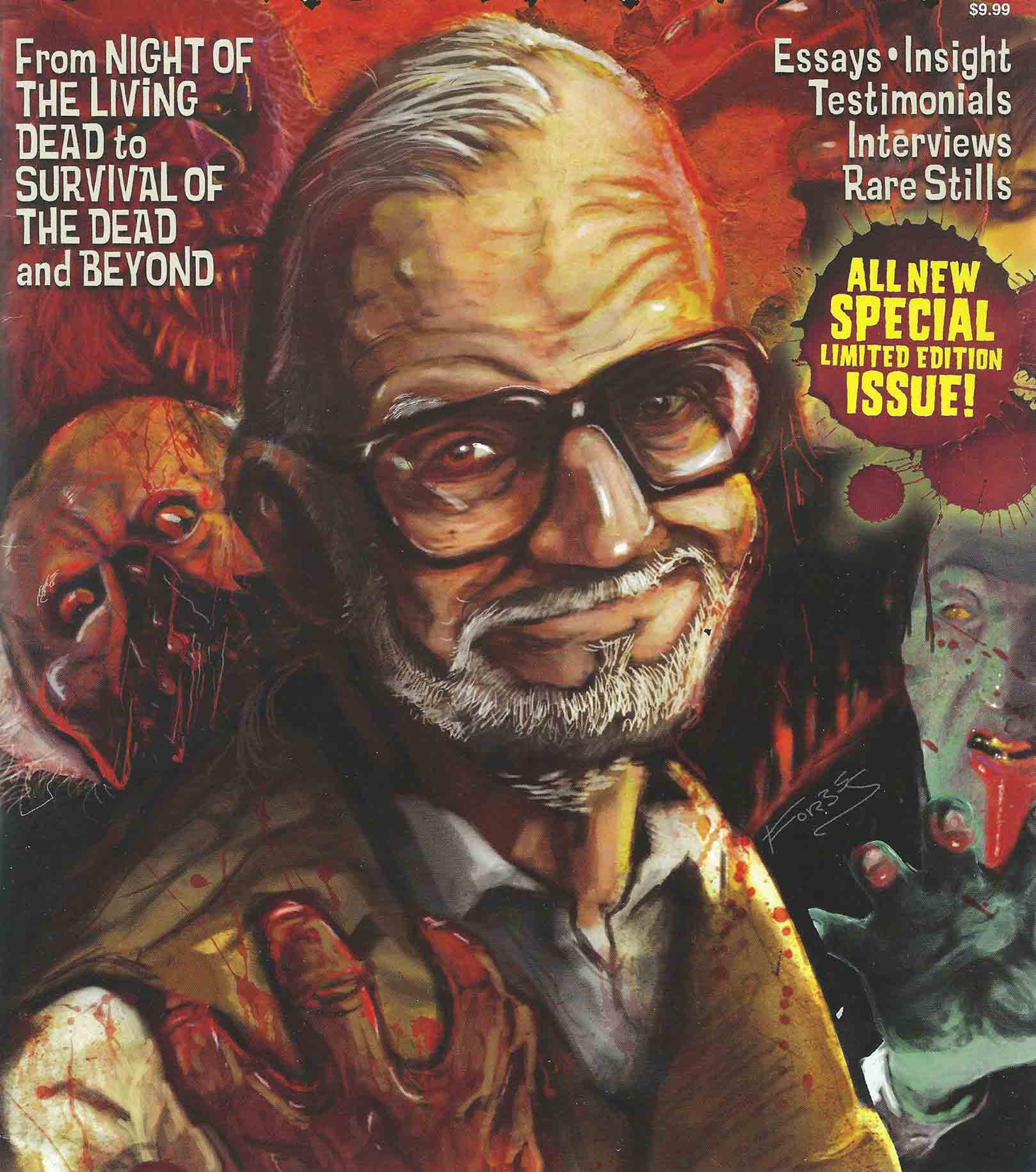

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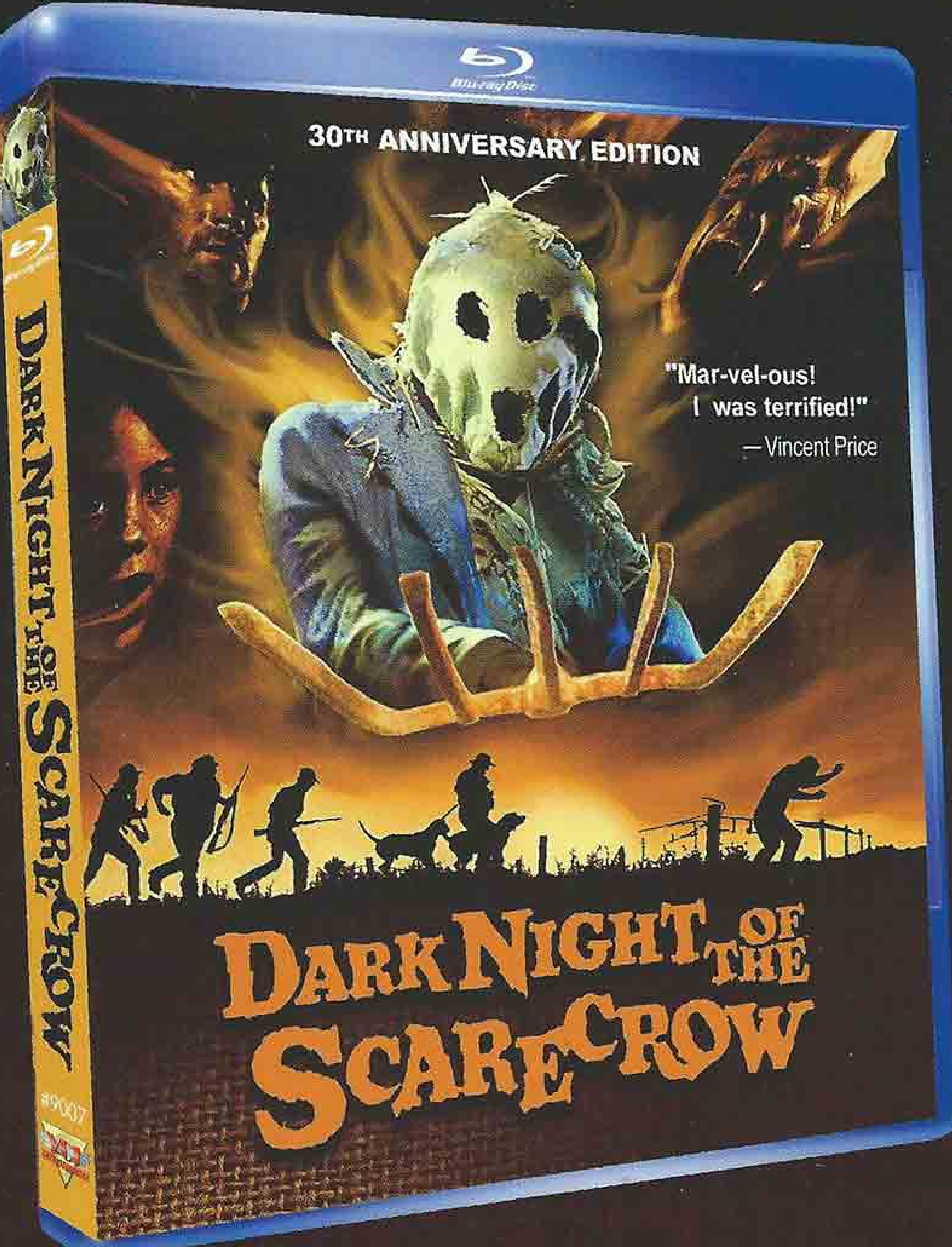
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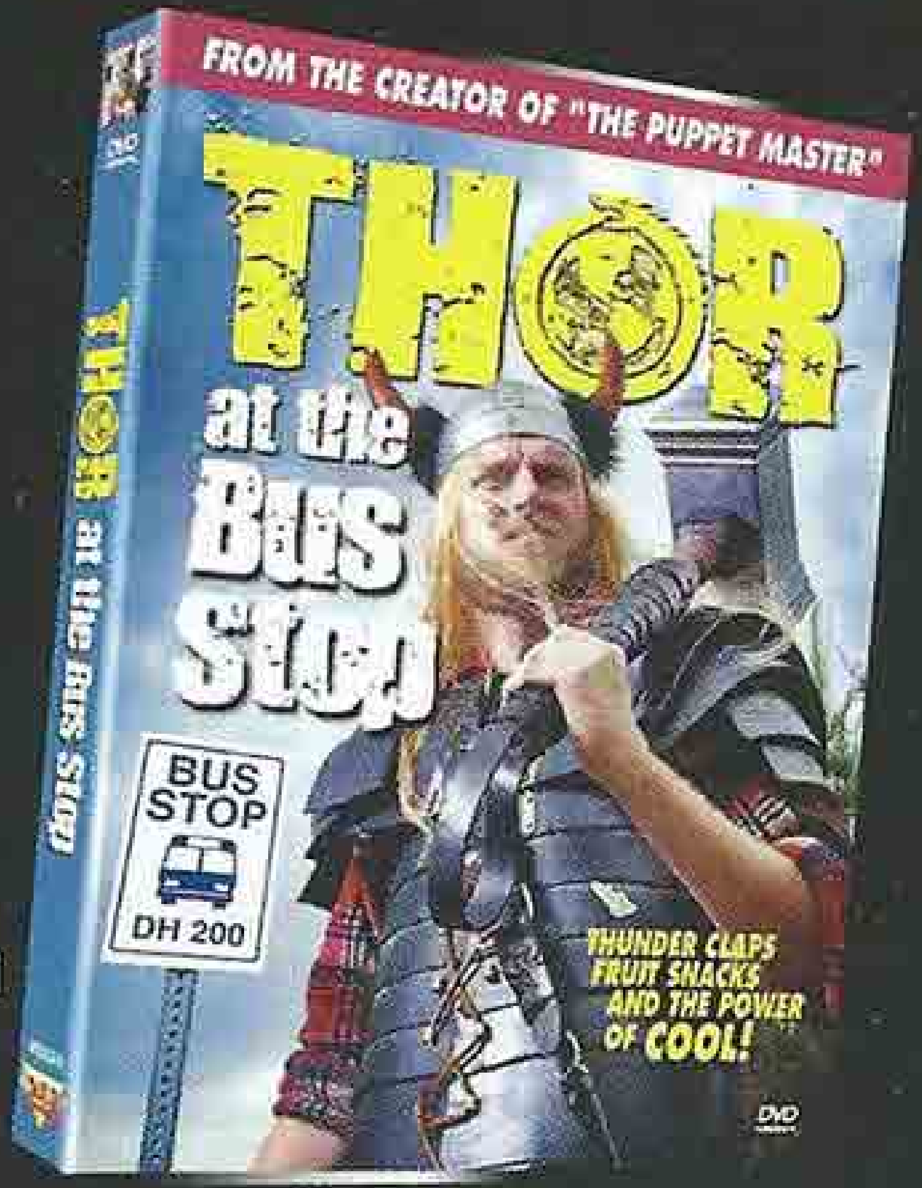
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From the Editor...

You are holding in your damn dirty hands the first of an ongoing series of special, limited-edition FANGORIA-crafted love letters to the men and women who have defined and progressed the parameters of the genre that you and I have devoted much of our adult lives to. FANGORIA LEGENDS kicks off with the man who has been with us since the first bloody issue in 1979, and continues to be our biggest commercial draw and one of our strongest high-profile supporters, a man who needs no introduction and who we are all blessed to share space with.

Writer, director, producer and genuinely wonderful multihyphenate George A. Romero is our guest of honor this round, and to be frank, it was a challenge to create the content for this mag. Romero's work has been slavishly catalogued, discussed, debated and analyzed, so was there anything new we could add? And poor Uncle George—well, he has done the same until he was almost as blue in the face as Tom Savini's *Dawn of the Dead* ghouls.

So, what to do...

Well, we tried to celebrate the work by getting staffers and FANGORIA pals to write about each one of Romero's horror films (offbeat stuff like *There's Always Vanilla* is referenced only fleetingly), focusing on important elements of the pictures like the music, the performances and, of course, the global fan culture that surrounds his legacy. And of course, we offer some words with the man himself, a new interview that reflects exactly where Romero is today. Our cover was painted by regular Fango writer and picturemaker Kelly Forbes, and what follows is 68 pages of reverence to the great man. We sincerely hope you enjoy it.

As the man himself often signs off...STAY SCARED!

—Chris Alexander, Editor
chris@fangoria.com

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Dedicated to Bill Hinzman (1936-2012).

Cover Art: Kelly Forbes

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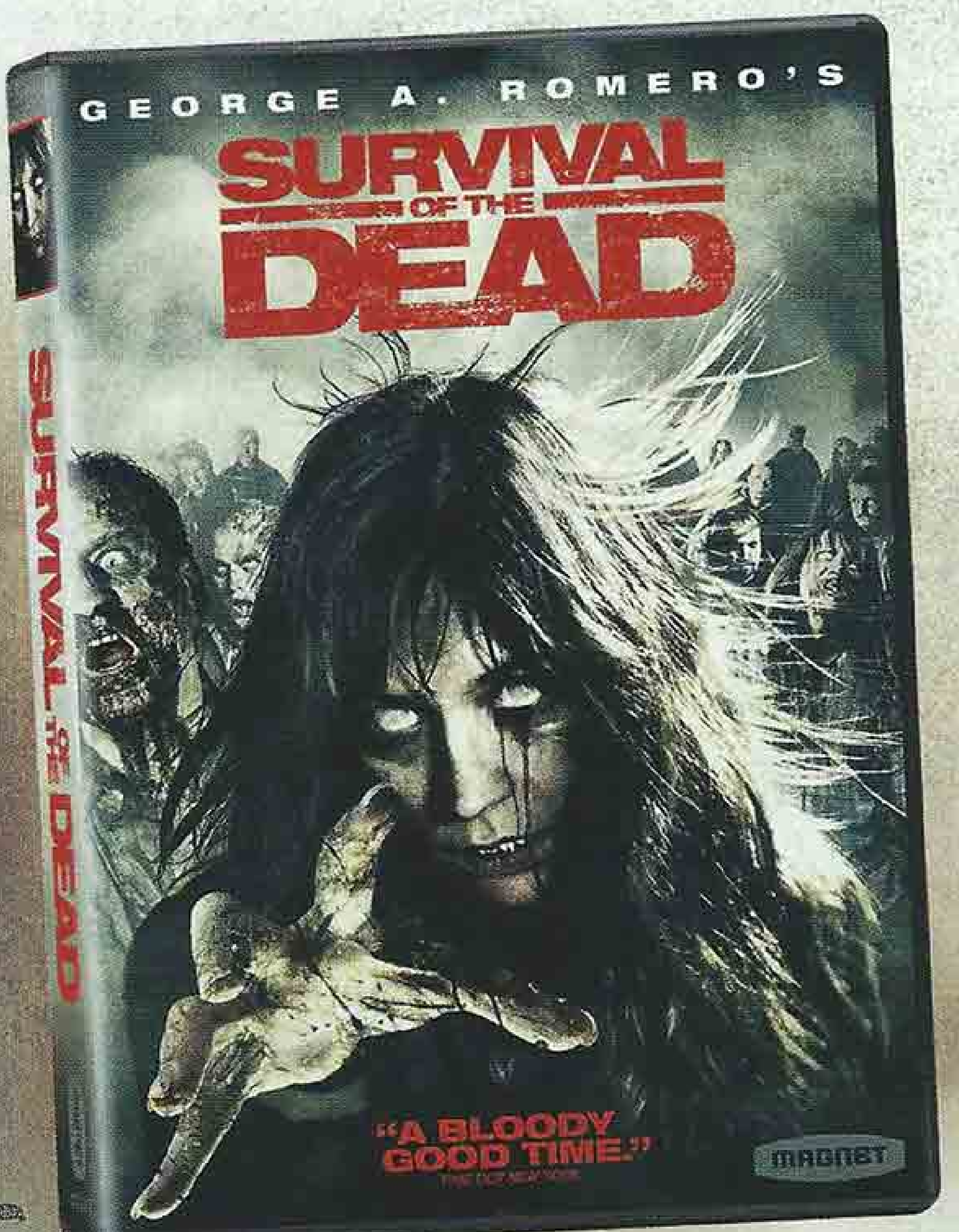
FROM THE HORROR MASTER GEORGE A. ROMERO

From the creator of one of the most celebrated American horror film franchises of all time, a new chapter in a legendary saga...

"RABIDLY ENTERTAINING!"

– Dennis Dermody, *Paper*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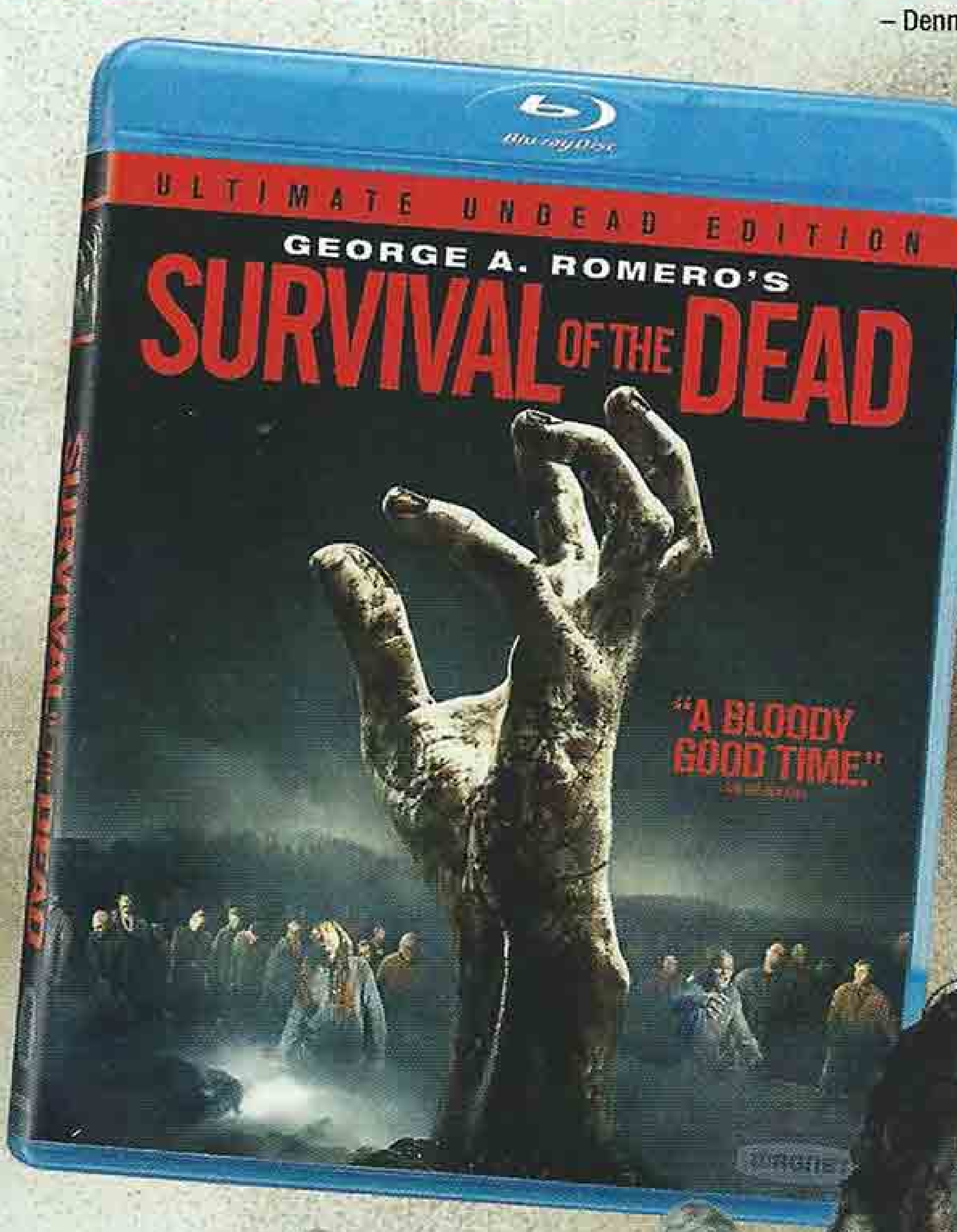
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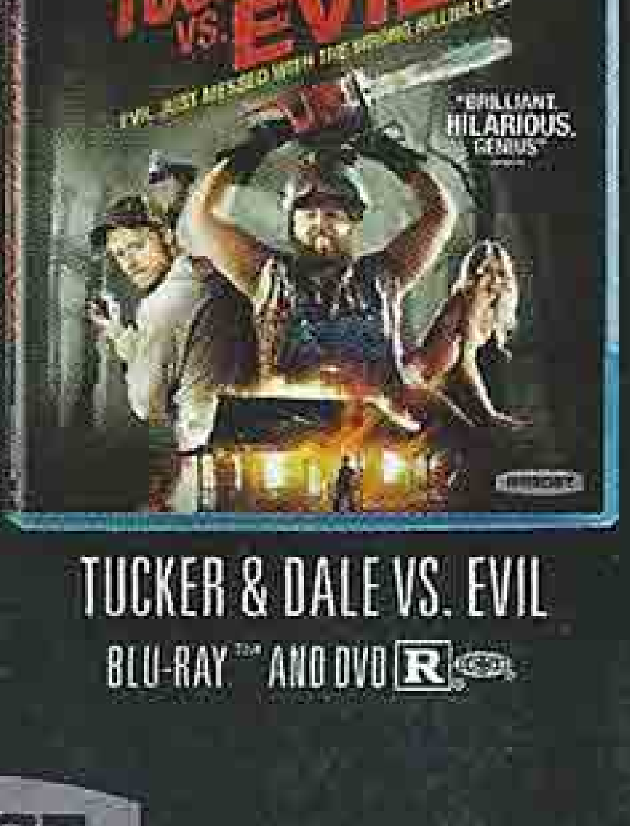
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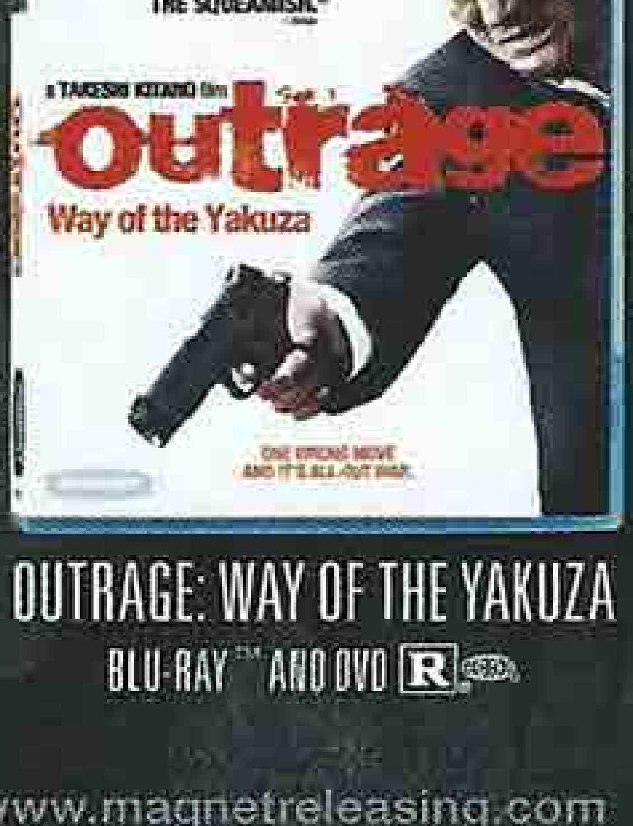
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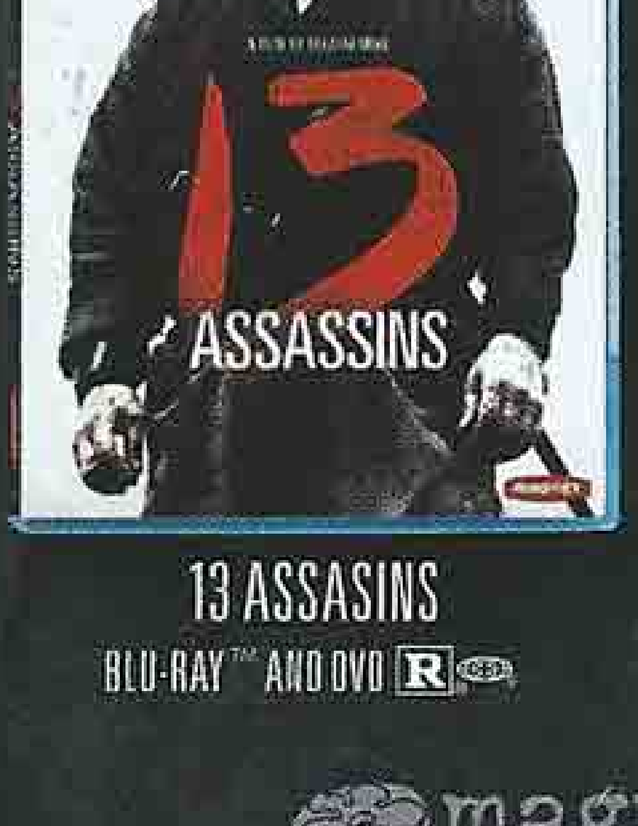
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LATENT TALENT

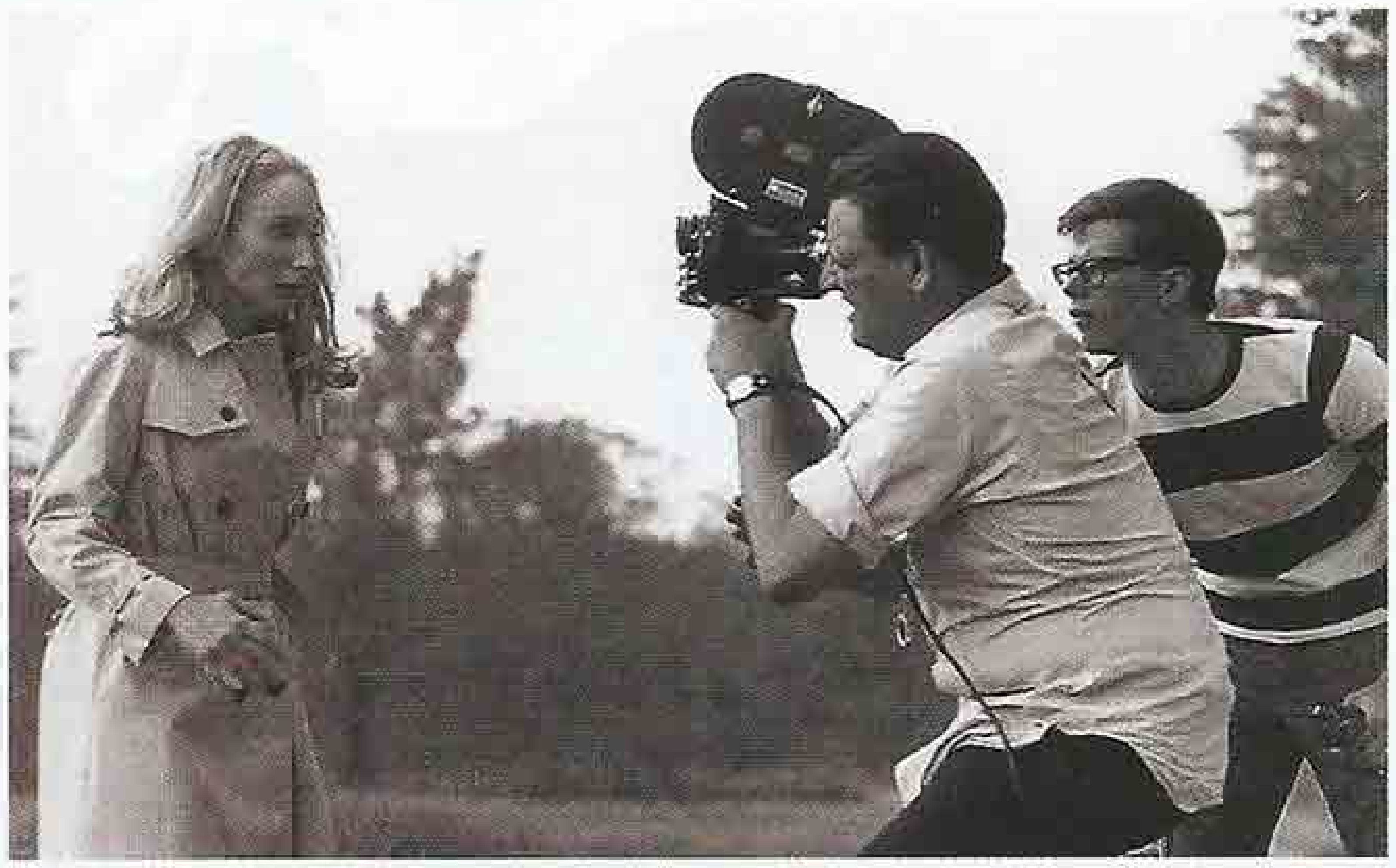
John Russo remembers the days leading up to "Night of the Living Dead" and the little company that made it a reality.

By CHRIS ALEXANDER

John Russo is the other side of the *Night of the Living Dead* coin, a force behind the film who went on to sculpt his own voice in horror and zombie lore—perhaps without the commercial success Romero found, but certainly with the same verve and passion. Both men served their salad days with the Latent Image company, an industrial-film outfit where they developed a language of cinema. Without those years, a major milestone in horror moviemaking would never have happened. Below, Russo sheds some light on a less illuminated region of the Romero-verse.

FANGORIA: How did The Latent Image first come together?

JOHN RUSSO: George Romero, Russ Streiner and I are all about the same age, and we met when we were 18 years old. Our friend Rudy Ricci met George on his first day at Carnegie Mellon University—then Carnegie Tech—where they were both fine arts majors. I was at West Virginia University, but Rudy and I remained in constant touch, and he told me on the phone that I had to meet this "great guy" who was drawing scenes from *Ben-Hur* when he was supposed to be drawing the life models in their art classes. That was George Romero, who was totally nuts about movies.

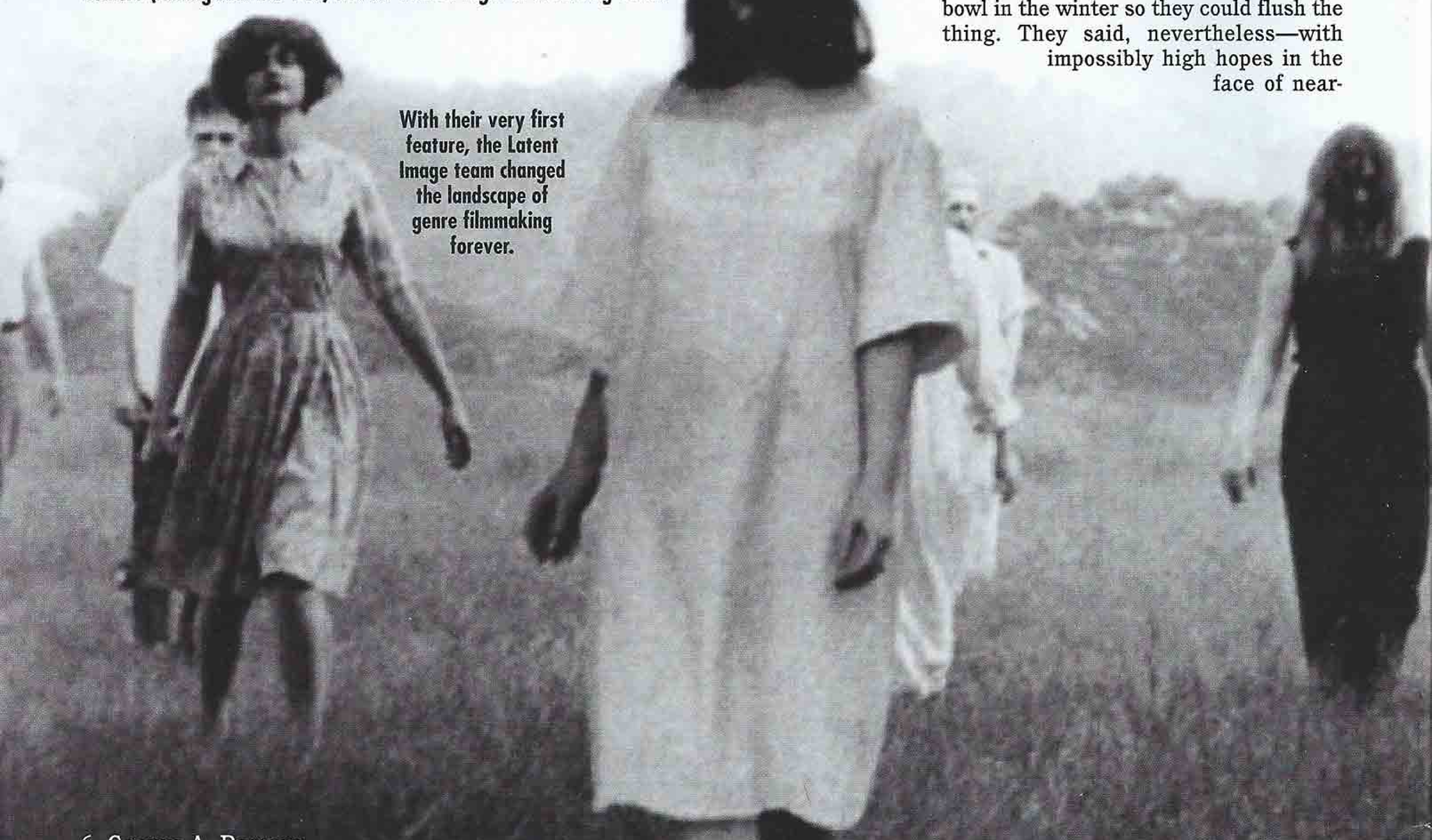


The crew was small but the ambitions were great when George A. Romero (filming Judith O'Dea) and co. tackled *Night of the Living Dead.*

So when I came home for Christmas vacation, Rudy and I drove to George's apartment in Pittsburgh, and George came out wearing a sombrero, pistolas, criss-crossed ammo belts, a drooping mustachio, etc.—like the actors in *Viva Zapata*, which was another of his favorite movies at that time. I thought this was great! So we drove to a Dairy Queen for ice cream, and the girl at the counter slammed the window shut on us.

George convinced all of us, by and by, that we could actually make a movie on our own. So Russ, Rudy and George formed a company called Ram Productions and got $2,000 from George's uncle. The movie they made was called *Expostulations*, and was a series of comic vignettes. I was enthralled by all this, but could only be part of it during breaks from WVU and on summer vacation. It got shot, but there was no money for a soundtrack. So the movie remained unfinished.

George and Russ were left with a 16mm Bolex and $500 borrowed from Rudy's cousin Richard, who later was the first zombie shot in the head in *Night of the Living Dead*. They decided they'd try to do TV spots and so on, till they could build up a stock of equipment and hopefully profits to make a real feature movie. So they started The Latent Image. Meantime, I got drafted, and when I visited George and Russ before I left for basic training, they were living and working out of a rundown storefront on the south side of Pittsburgh, and they usually had nothing to eat and had to chip ice out of the commode bowl in the winter so they could flush the thing. They said, nevertheless—with impossibly high hopes in the face of near-



With their very first feature, the Latent Image team changed the landscape of genre filmmaking forever.

poverty—that if they were doing well when I got out of the Army, I could come and work with them. That "impossible dream" kept me going till I got discharged. And after I taught school for a year or so, they had built up their credentials and had gotten a $30,000 loan, so they really did offer me a job—and I leaped at the chance!

"We gave 200 percent to everything we did, including *Night of the Living Dead*. That movie was not a fluke."

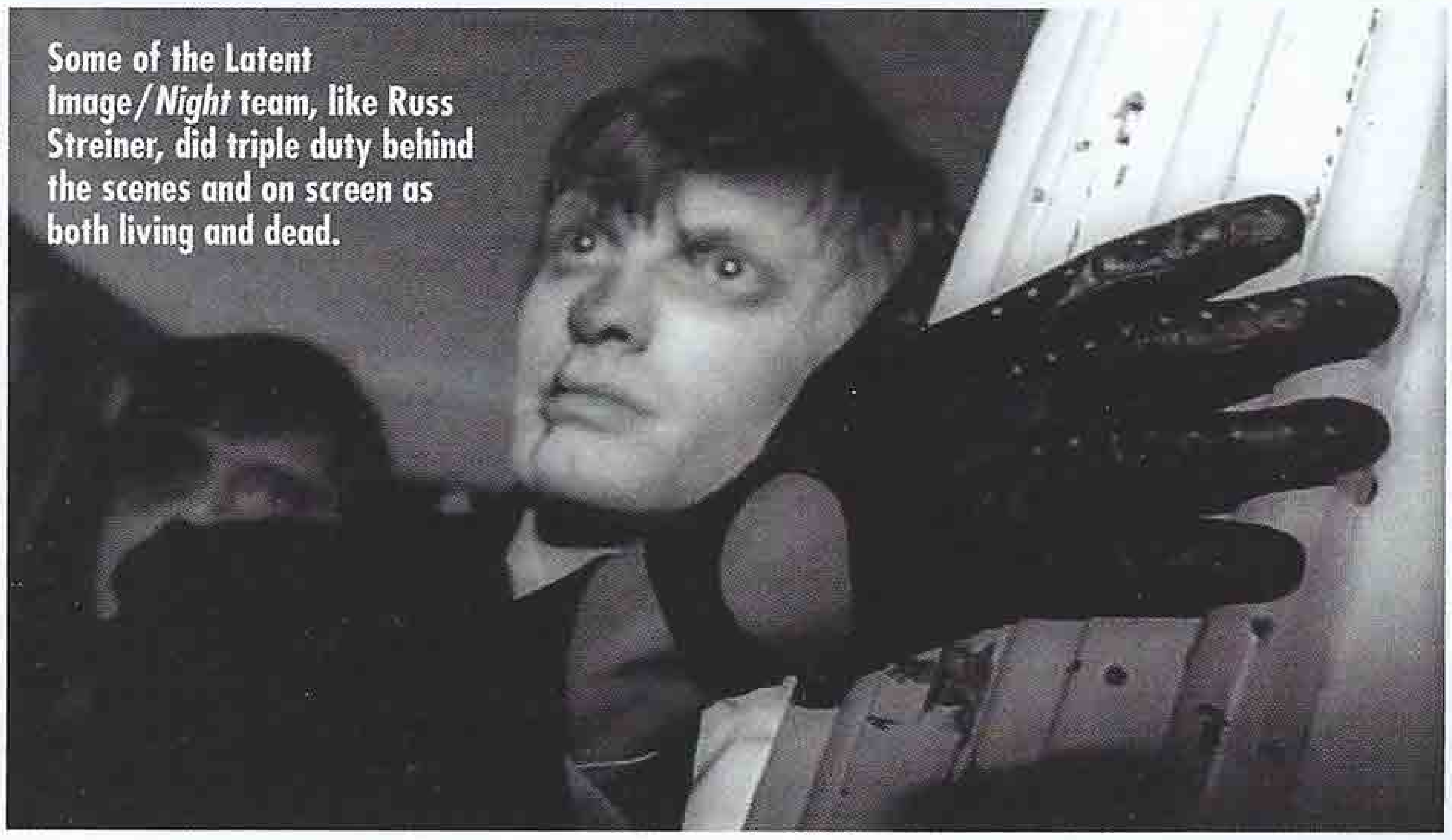
FANG: What kind of man was George back then? Has he changed much?

RUSSO: Everybody liked George—and we all still do. He was heavier then, and had dimples that girls loved, and a terrific intellect, artistic drive and a great sense of humor. An extremely talented guy. He could act, he could draw, he could paint portraits and landscapes, could do amazingly hilarious cartoons and on and on. He was also a born genius with a camera and with film editing.

He's still a great guy, and has not faltered. Other than growing older, as we all must, he is still great fun to be with, and a genial giant.

FANG: Did you guys being movie fans give your productions an edge over your competitors?

RUSSO: We were the moviemaking "bohemians" of our day. When ad-agency folks wanted a really good job on a low budget, they came to us, and we obliged. We won many, many awards for our work, going up against stuff that cost a lot more. And we were extremely proud of our abilities and accomplishments.


Some of the Latent Image/*Night* team, like Russ Streiner, did triple duty behind the scenes and on screen as both living and dead.

FANG: What are your fondest memories of working during that period?

RUSSO: Well, as I mentioned, the great camaraderie. I treasure that. We worked hard, we gave 200 percent to everything we did, including *Night of the Living Dead*. That movie was not a fluke, in that by that time we were a really tight-knit, creative and dedicated production team, and were solidly behind George as the director.

FANG: Do you still have that old film work? Is some of it lost?

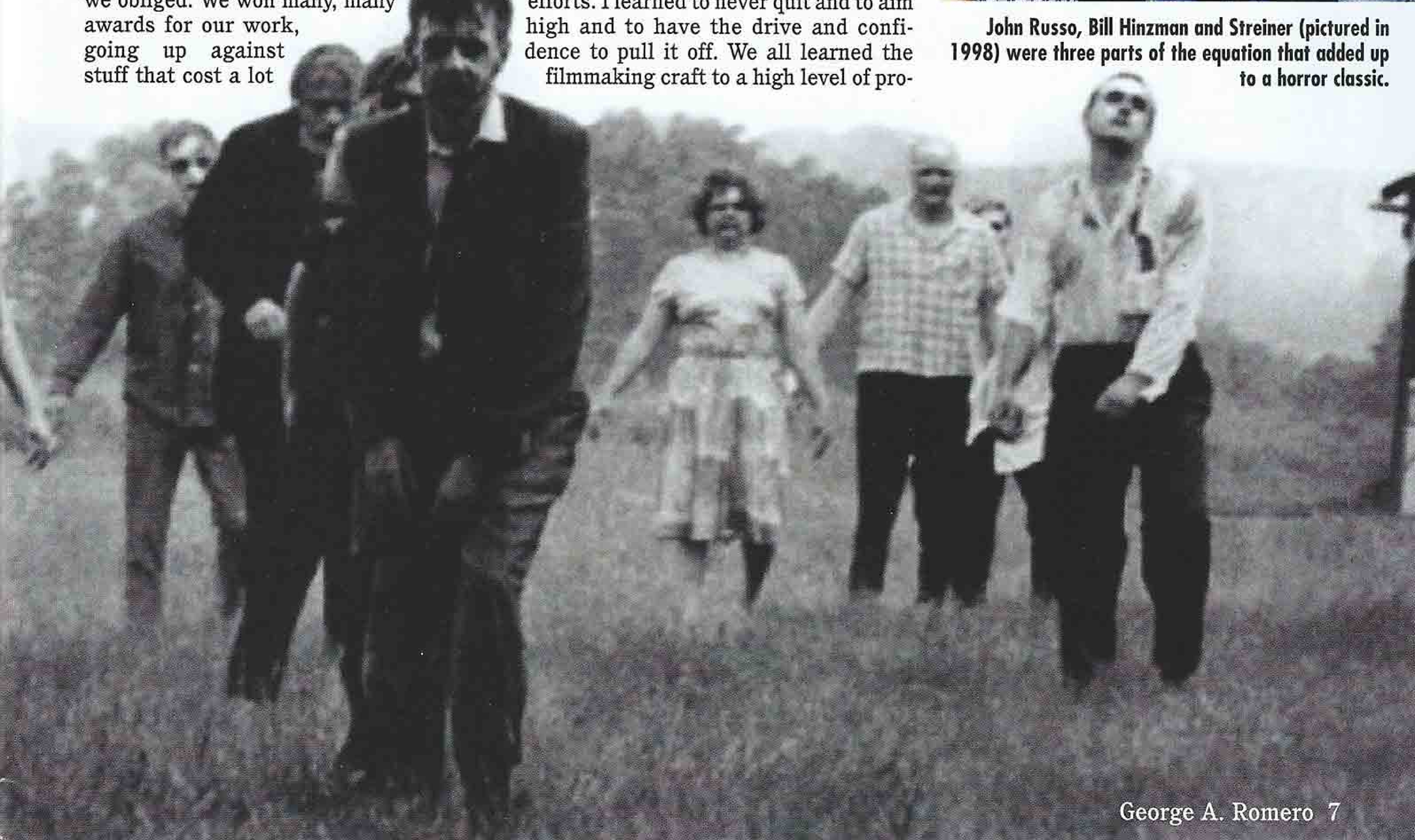
RUSSO: I still have sample reels, TV spots and documentaries from that period. Some of the best things, unfortunately, were lost in a flood in the 1970s.

FANG: What was the greatest thing you learned while running The Latent Image?

RUSSO: We all learned from each other's efforts. I learned to never quit and to aim high and to have the drive and confidence to pull it off. We all learned the filmmaking craft to a high level of professionalism by starting from scratch and doing hundreds of productions, no matter how high or low the budgets might have been. We have an indomitable fondness for each other because we spent those days "in the trenches" together, and no one can take those memories or that mutual respect away from us.

John Russo, Bill Hinzman and Streiner (pictured in 1998) were three parts of the equation that added up to a horror classic.

Photo: Copyright Market Square



NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD

"The one that got away"

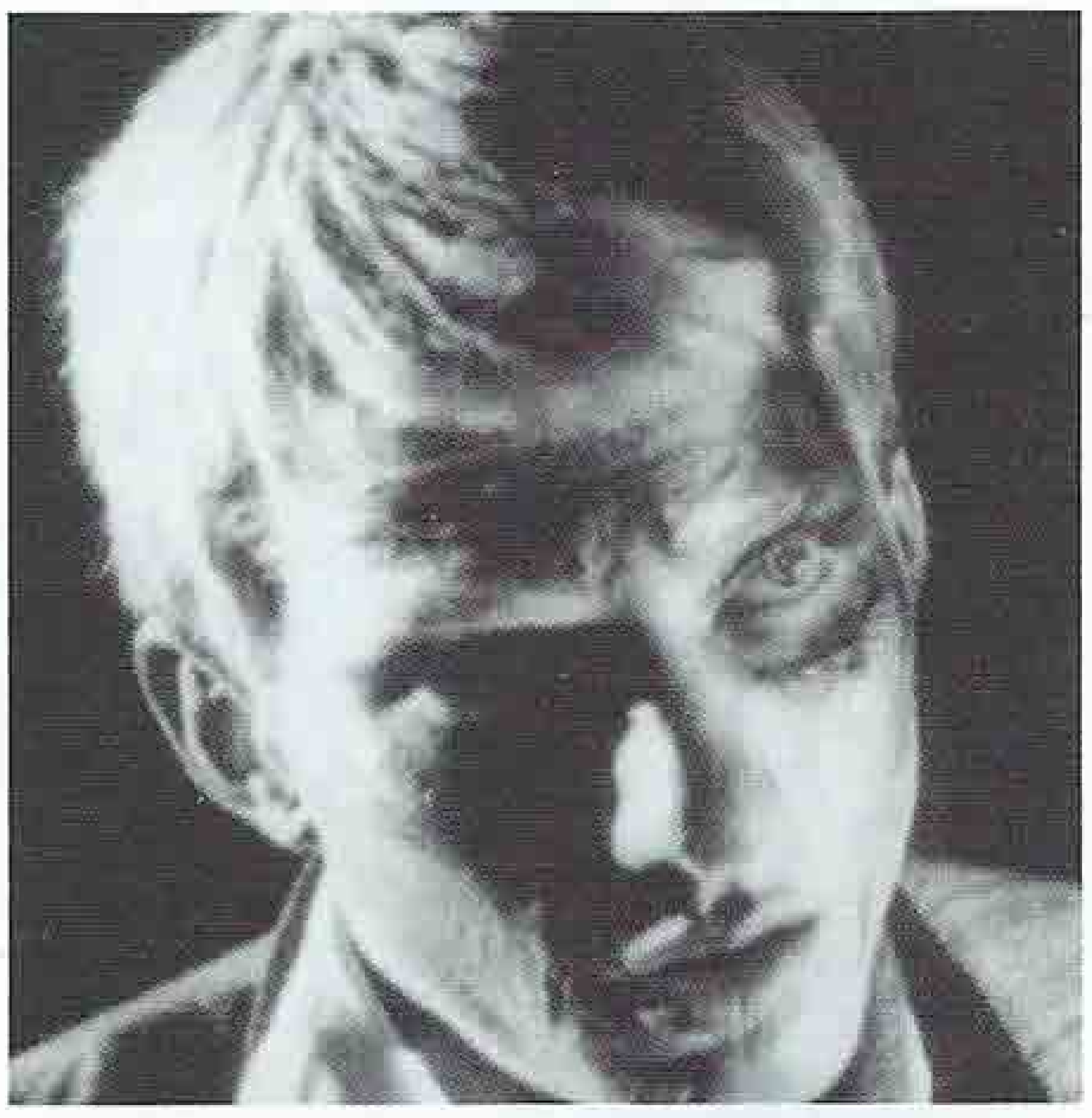
From the moment the screen fades from black onto that long and winding, grainy black-and-white road, and the dread-filled needle-drop music plays dramatically on the soundtrack, we know that we're in trouble—deep, dark trouble. As a pin-prick car comes closer into view as it snakes along that road, and the crudely placed title card reading *Night of the Living Dead* pops into view, the deal is sealed. This is a horror film. And we know from the unbroken gaze of this lengthy shot that whatever twists the next torturous 90 minutes will take, we will not—we *can* not—look away.

George A. Romero's original classic broke down numerous barriers in horror cinema.

Night of the Living Dead is a grueling experience. Even four decades and change later, it's a wrenching, horrifying film, and it doesn't matter that its thrust and imagery have been absorbed into every facet of the genre an infinite number of times. It still maintains its weird power, its straight-faced, rough-around-every-edge, serrated sting of pure, unfiltered nightmarish horror. Its social and political points may or may not have been by design, but this, more so than in any other Romero film, is irrelevant. *Night* is just about frightened people trying to stay safe, and—as is the way in every manmade crisis—they end up harming themselves more than the threat they cower from does. And of course, it's also about the living dead trying to eat people, a concept that was new in 1968 and sent so many people into shock—and rightfully so.

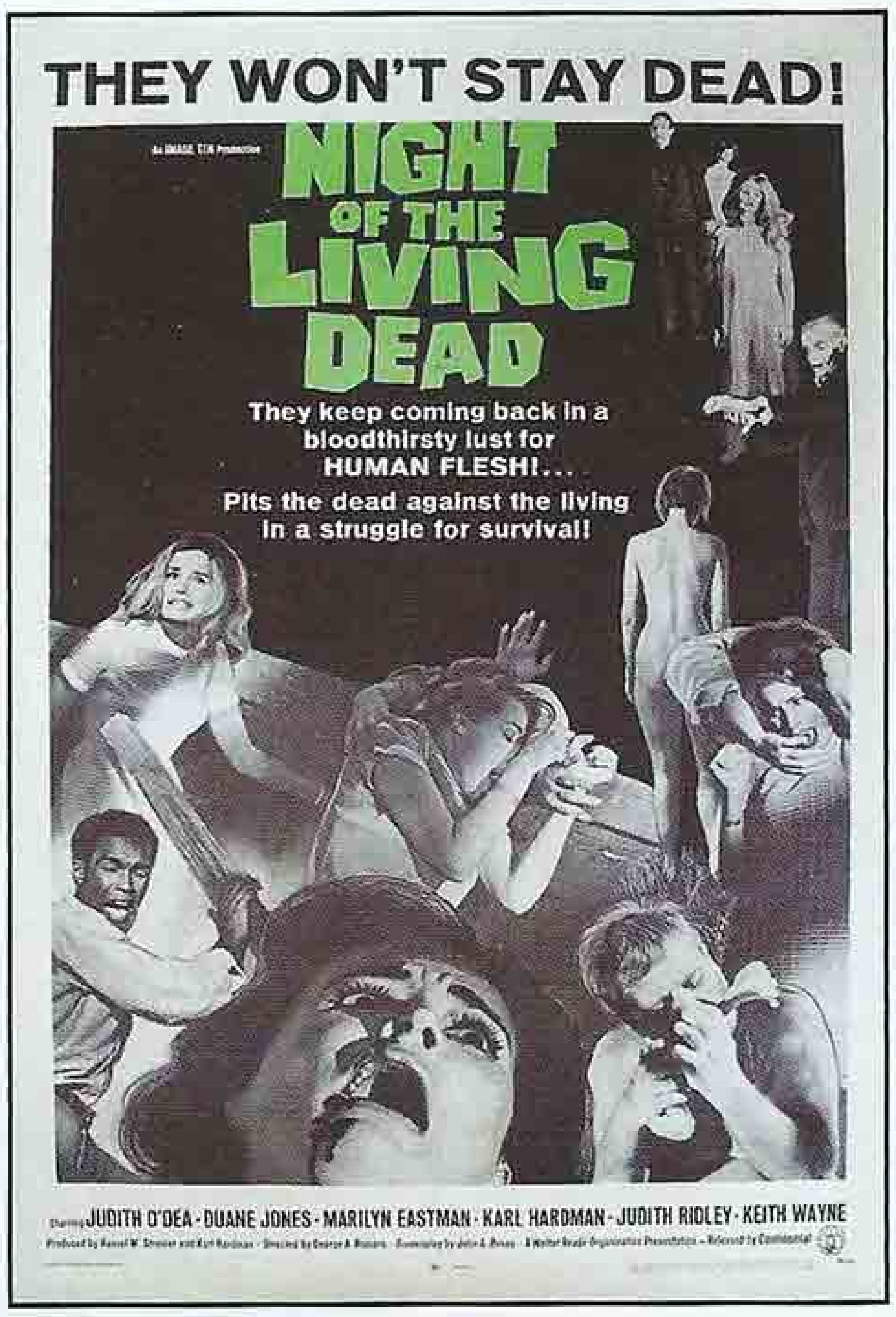
But we digress. There is very little chance that you, dear reader, are not aware of the mechanisms of this film, and even less chance of you being unaware of or unexposed to it. But for the slimmer-than-paper margin who aren't savvy, we shall tell you what George A. Romero's towering maiden effort of madness and zombie hell is all about.

Brother and sister Johnny (Russ Streiner) and Barbra (Judith O'Dea) take that grey road to visit the cemetery where their mother is buried and place flowers by her grave. As the thunder rolls and Johnny teases his easily spooked sister ("They're coming to get you, Barbra!"), a twitchy, wild-eyed lunatic attacks them, smashing Johnny's head upon a stone and rampaging toward a hysterical Barbra. After a relentless pursuit, the terrified girl bursts into a seemingly abandoned farmhouse, where more horrors await before she is eventually rescued by the two-fisted Ben (Duane Jones).



No amount of full-color gore could equal the impact of these black-and-white ghouls.

It's at this point that *Night* shifts narrative allegiance, as Barbara slips into near-catatonia and Ben rallies to board the house up against the mounting forces of dead-eyed killers outside. When other survivors emerge from the basement, we learn that the masses of murderers are in fact the living dead, and that only destroying their brains will put them back down. And the night has only begun…


THEY WON'T STAY DEAD!
NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD
They keep coming back in a bloodthirsty lust for HUMAN FLESH!...
Pits the dead against the living in a struggle for survival!
Starring JUDITH O'DEA · DUANE JONES · MARILYN EASTMAN · KARL HARDMAN · JUDITH RIDLEY · KEITH WAYNE

They rose from the grave in '68, and they haven't been at rest since.

It's a testament to both Romero and John Russo's script and the happy accidents of low-budget, scrappy filmmaking that *Night* had such impact upon release. Casting was also key, though Romero has often insisted that placing Jones—a black man—in the lead of his horror film was not a political choice but simply because he was the best man for the job. But such were the '60s that *Night* perhaps inadvertently bubbles with the troubles of its time. Romero has also stated that the drive from Pittsburgh to New York City with a print of the film prepped for sale to distributors was dampened by news on the radio of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. When the world is askew, pop culture often acts as a reflection of the social climate, whether it knows it or not.

But Jones certainly was the best man for the gig, skin color be damned. He's tough, fit, determined, compassionate, urgent—a real fleshed-out movie hero in a genre often populated by stock characters. And he's surrounded by equally ace amateur performers, chief among them co-financer Karl Hardman as blustery bastard Harry Cooper, who acts in direct opposition to Ben's efforts to keep the survivors above ground while he holes up with his wife and bitten daughter in the basement.

The irony of the piece, of course, is that loutish behavior be damned, Harry—his horrific fate notwithstanding—is probably right. The cellar was the best place to be, as the final chilling shots of misplaced bullets and burning bodies prove. Accidental or not, when the lights come up on *Night of the Living Dead*, it's not just sheer visceral terror we've lived through; it's a work of intelligent parable. Of course, it didn't make any money for its creators—though certainly, the world has profited from it ever since—because of the distributor changing the title from *Night of the Flesh Eaters* and forgetting to put a copyright on the new credits, resulting in the erroneous belief that the flick is in the public domain. "It's the one that got away," Romero has said. It's also the one that literally changed the world of dark fantasy and horror storytelling forever.

—*Chris Alexander*

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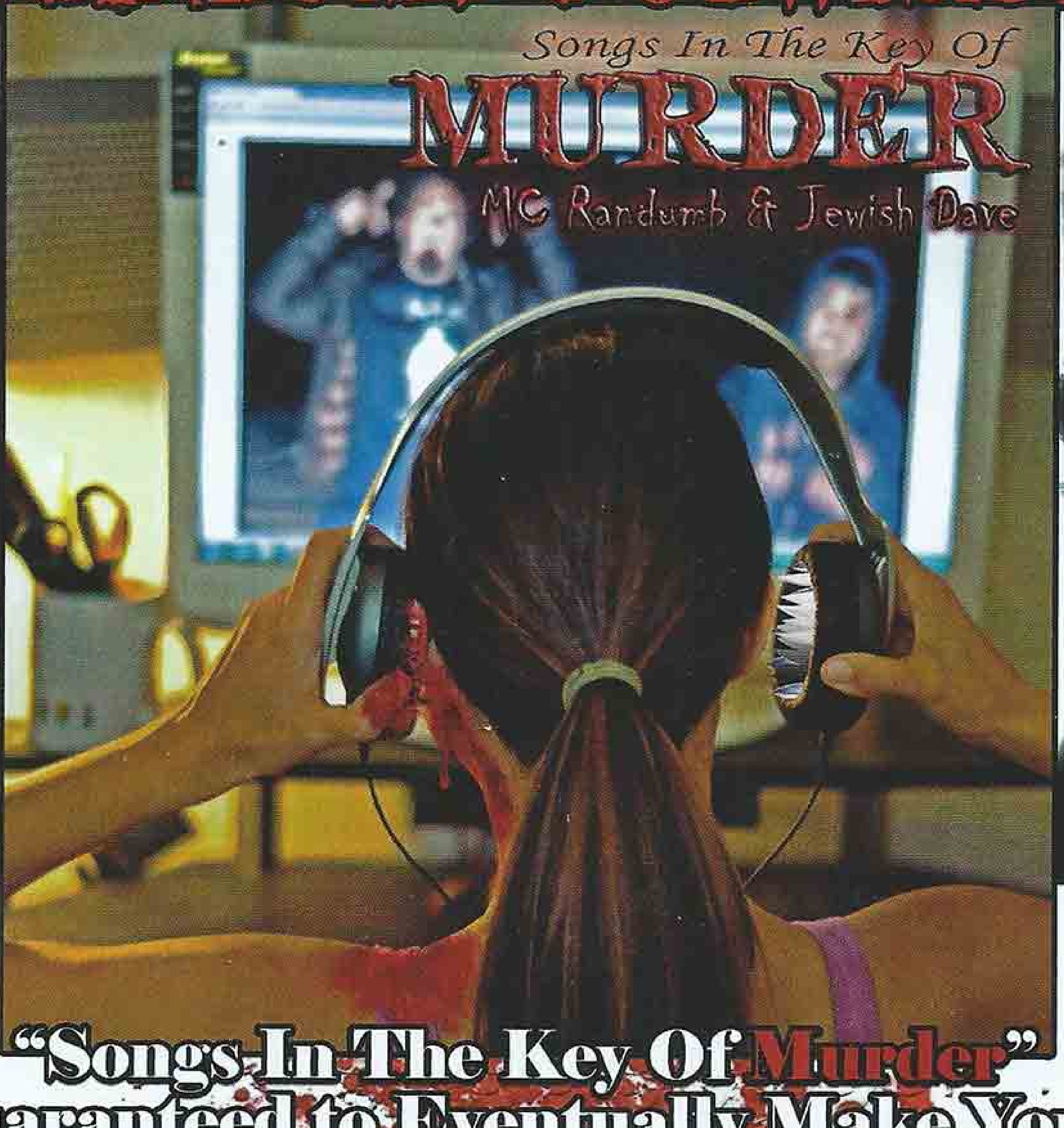

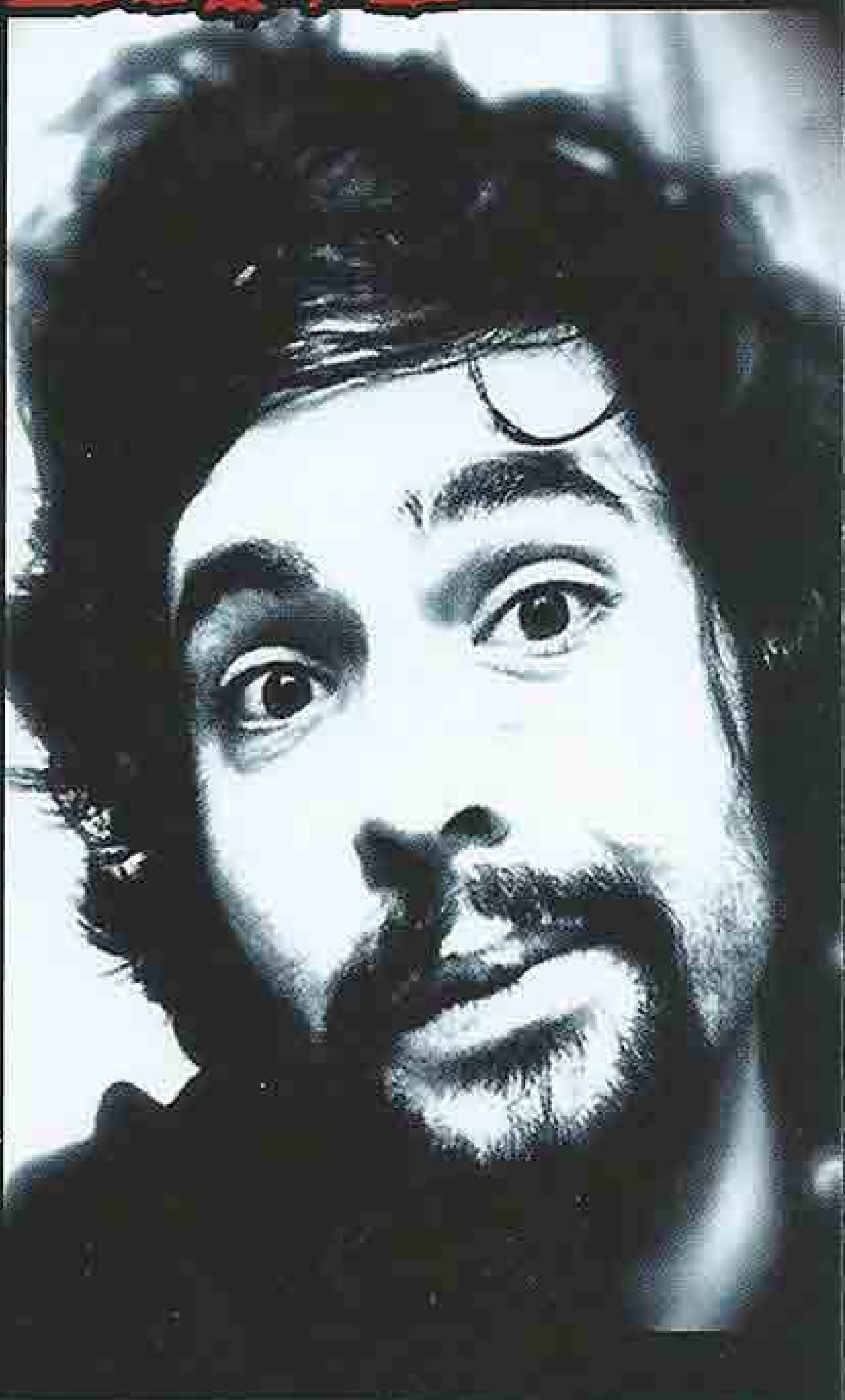

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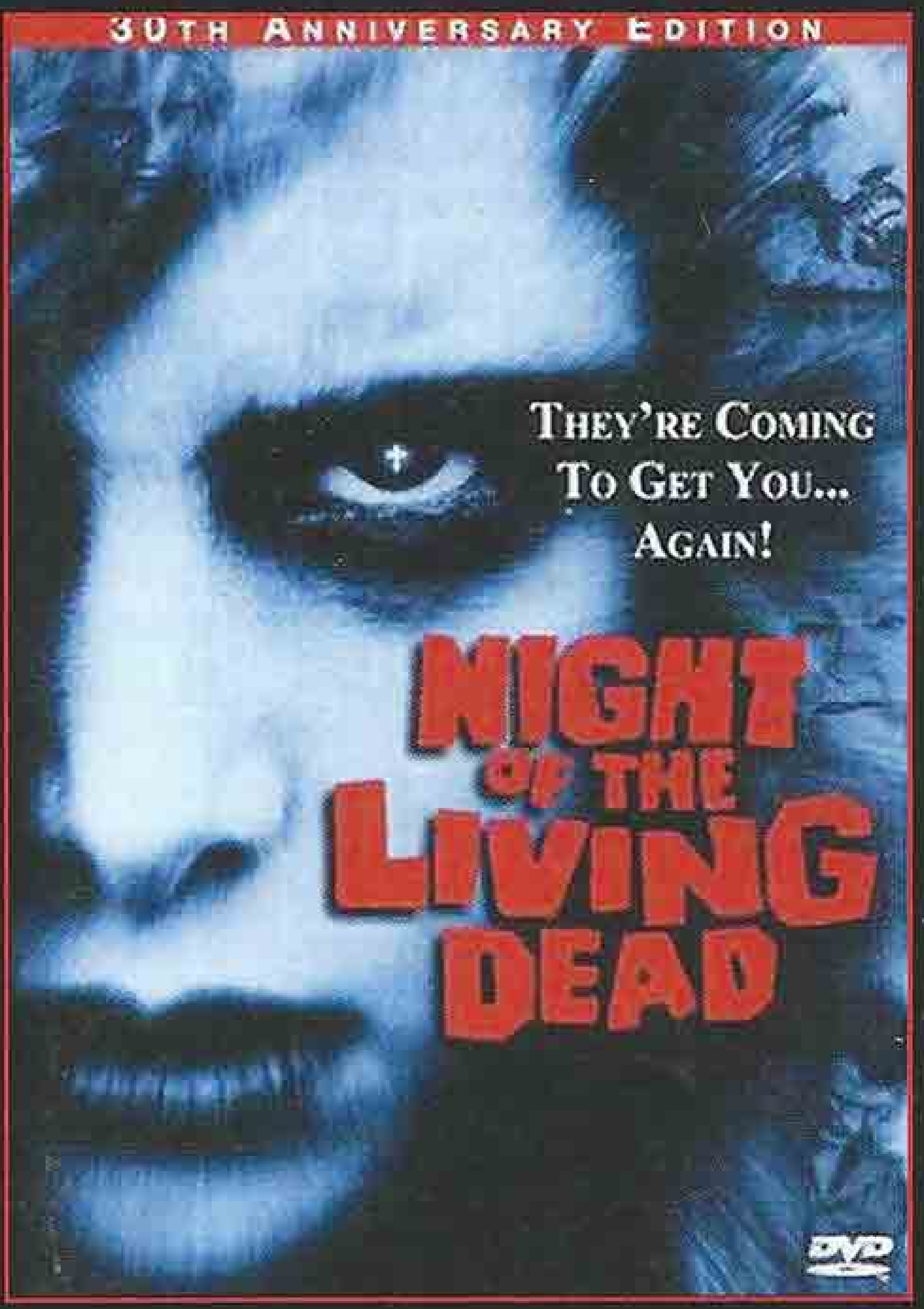
A NIGHTMARE ON ZOMBIE STREET

The 30th-anniversary edition of "Night" was anything but celebrated—but it was misunderstood.

By DEBBIE ROCHON



My experience before and after shooting *Night of the Living Dead*'s 30th-anniversary edition was something like playing the kid's game "telephone," where one by one, each person playing gets told a piece of information and has to pass it onto the next person. By the end of the game, the story only faintly resembles the original pitch.

Having known John Russo through our previous film and print work together for his now-defunct Market Square Productions, I was privy to info regarding his projects. I had heard a rumor about a film job he was about to produce that sounded too crazy to be true. I called John up and asked him for the lowdown, and once I heard what he had up his sleeve, I felt my heart beat a little faster. Russo, along with a large group of the original *Night of the Living Dead* posse, was about to shoot 18 minutes of new black-and-white footage to add to one of the most beloved horror films ever made. It wasn't that hard for me, due to our friendship, to pretty much threaten his life if he didn't cast me in it! John chuckled at my death threat, and said he would fit me in if I was able to be on location when they were shooting—which was soon.

It turned out that originally, George A. Romero was set to helm this Anchor Bay-funded project. The distributor would have a major bonus selling point to this new creature that would be known as *Night of the Living Dead: 30th Anniversary Edition*; the original feature would be fully remastered into beautiful, pristine shape to accompany the new edition in the DVD set, so you would have both versions in your hands. This would be the first time *Night* would get some long-overdue visual love.

As it happened, Romero, I was told, was then hired as the director of the first *Resident Evil* film, and that shoot ended up conflicting with *Night 30*'s. There was a deadline, after all, that couldn't be postponed: This was 1998, and it was already 30 years since the original's release. They most certainly had to get the new 18 minutes in the can and start working on it. Why 18 minutes, you ask? Apparently, this changes a film enough to file a new copyright on it; it then becomes a new "work of art," and if they could get that, *Night*'s creators, Image Ten Productions, could finally own the rights to the movie—one that languished for three decades while hundreds if not thousands of individuals made money bootlegging it. This also created the mystique that *Night* was always intended to be grainy and washed-out as part of its style. Not true: It just kept disintegrating when the free-for-all started, and typically, a copy of a copy of a copy was the bootleggers' "master."

"Imagine if you were asked to be cut into your favorite movie...would you do it? Of course you would."

Adding to the classic film allowed Karl Hardman (left, with Rochon) and Russell Streiner (right) to truly own their masterpiece.

So I took an Amtrak train directly from Dragon*Con in Atlanta to Pittsburgh with nothing but sheer unbridled excitement coursing through my veins. Now, imagine if you were asked to be cut into your favorite movie, be it *Hellraiser*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Nightmare on Elm Street* or *Nosferatu*—would you do it? Of course you would, and I wouldn't believe you if you said no. That was exactly how I felt. What an honor! It was exciting to have so many of the original cast on set; Marilyn Eastman costumed me and helped with make-up. Keep in mind, we were matching the look of the original, even using the same brand of film stock they did in '68 so it would edit as seamlessly as possible. The late Karl Hardman was there supervising, as well as Russ Streiner. Bill Hinzman was on camera and John became the default director.

The scenes we shot took place in a cemetery. I played a female reporter who was shooting on location at the site where the first ghoul was spotted, and now has been infested with the living dead. Sharpshooters nailed zombies all around while I reported on the scene. It was really exciting being there with so many of the people who made the original groundbreaking masterpiece.

Photos: Copyright Market Square

New *30th Anniversary* footage with Bill Hinzman revealed what happened the day before the *Night of the Living Dead.*

Funny, though—much like when *Night* first hit theaters in '68 to scathing reviews before finding its audience and going on to legendary status, so did the *30th Anniversary Edition*. Get scathing reviews, I mean, with the painful difference of never finding an audience, or a whole lot of people sympathetic to why the project was done in the first place. When I say people were brutal, I mean it was a horror show. Most writers got very personal toward the people involved. For example, here is one of hundreds of reviews that said very similar things: "This version is a raping of a great film. No scratch that, they raped it till it bled, knocked its teeth out then orally rapped [sic] it, and then used it as a toilet..."

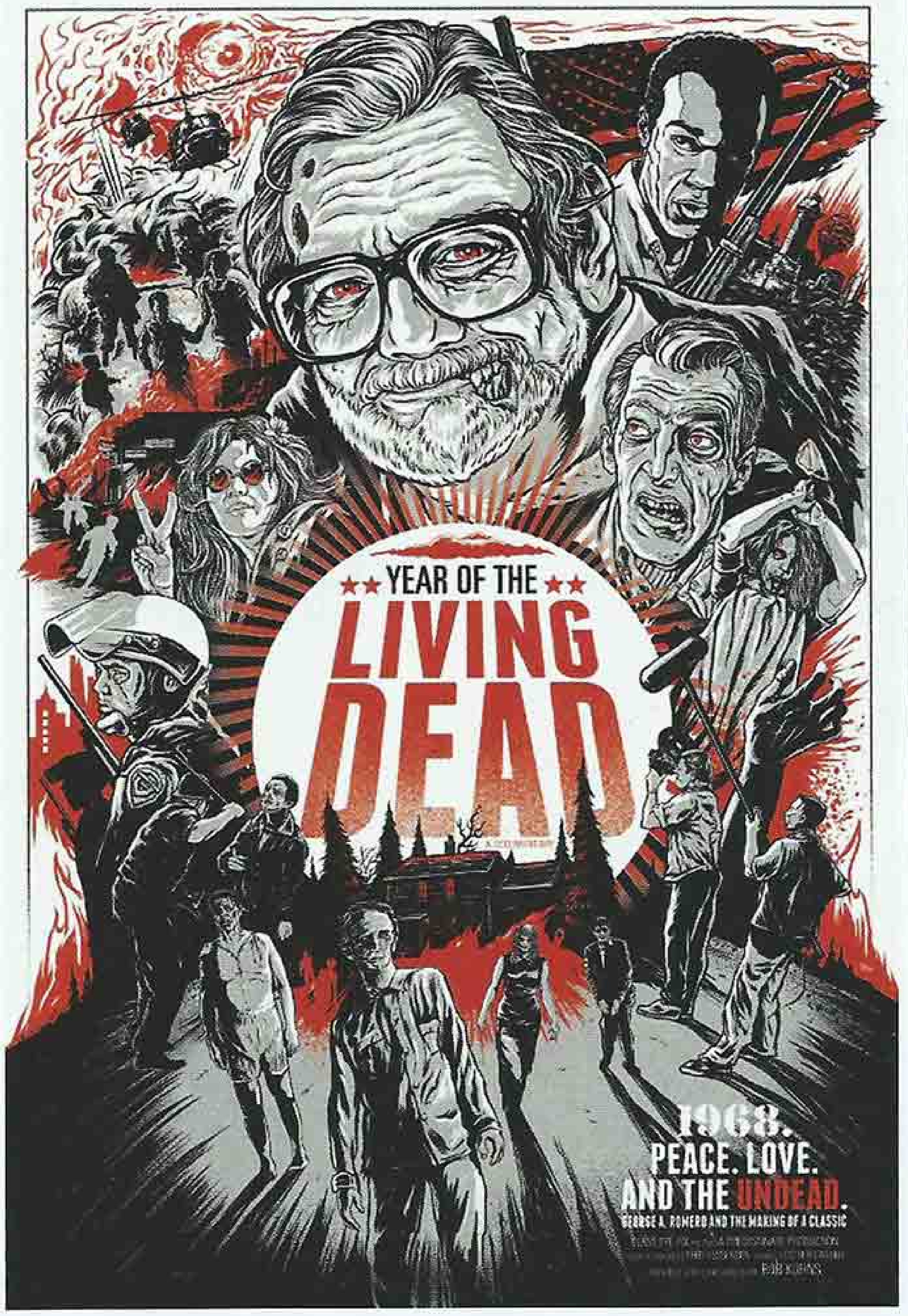
The year she shot her *Night* scenes, it was Debbie Rochon's 30th anniversary too.

I have heard pretty loud and clear Romero's disdain for this edition. I can't say I blame him; who would want anyone, even your original co-writer, cutting new scenes into your movie? As for Marilyn and Karl, as excited as they were while we were making it, they also shunned their newborn bastard child. Even Bill had nothing pleasant to say about it—and he shot it and reprised his role as the original ghoul in some new scenes. If this movie wasn't a wedge between the group, my guess is that it was at least a crack in the window of some of the friendships once it hit DVD. It then spiderwebbed across the glass once the reviewers got ahold of it. I'm sure many involved were used to much-deserved adulation up to that point from the original *Night*.

But this was probably a doomed project before it started. Critics, not knowing why it was done, not caring to find out any facts, just assumed it was John trying to make money on Romero's back. I have known John for many years now, and one thing he isn't is dishonest. He works hard for every small or large success he may have. When he explained to me the dynamics before and after the filming, I have no reason to believe anything else. I know that Romero has said he never had anything to do with this project at any point, including during its inception, but that was not my understanding. I don't pretend to know all the parties intimately, I was not at any *Night* board meetings; I can only report the way it went down at the time from where I stood and what I knew.

Very few people have anything nice to say about the *30th Anniversary Edition* and they constantly rip on the new soundtrack, but hey, both are fair game when anyone makes a film! You are allowed to hate our movies with a passion, if you like; that's the business we're in. But John took a really hard fall. Everyone blamed him and him alone. The copyright was now in the hands of the original group, and everybody got to walk away and distance themselves from this so-called "atrocity" except Russo. For all those who have directed insults, death threats and glib anonymous hate on the Internet toward him, all I can say is, get over it. Hate the movie, hate the music, but there's no need to take it as far as some have, when Russo had very genuine plans for all his associates: establish a copyright. Whether it was a success or failure in your eyes, it accomplished, for the group, what it set out to do. I just want to state for the record that I am so glad I did it. It was an electric feeling being on that set for two days, and I would do it again tomorrow with no regrets.

"YEAR," FEAR AND HISTORY



When *Night of the Living Dead* opened in 1968, it did more than invent a new horror subgenre; it demonstrated that a fright film could pointedly reflect and ruthlessly comment on the times in which it was made. As much as its groundbreaking, unrelenting terror, that quality has allowed it to endure over the decades, winning new fans every generation—including documentarian Rob Kuhns, who examines *Night*'s legacy in his upcoming *Year of the Living Dead*.

Kuhns, who first discovered *Night* while a student at New York University's film school in the early 1980s, initially intended *Year* to be a celebration of George A. Romero and his team's "little movie that could." After he and his wife/producing partner Esther Cassidy spent two days in Toronto interviewing the filmmaker, and he then plunged into editing, his point of view changed.

"In my spare time, I started a new job as an editor for *Bill Moyers Journal*, a weekly interview and news-analysis series on PBS," Kuhns recalls. "Moyers was the White House press secretary for Lyndon Johnson in the late '60s, and would frequently refer to that era in the show. I ended up getting steeped in that part of our history—the race rebellions across the country, the Vietnam War—and became fascinated thinking of Romero and his collaborators making this film about the world coming to an end at a historic time of enormous upheaval. *Night* started revealing itself as a living document of exactly the period in which it was made.

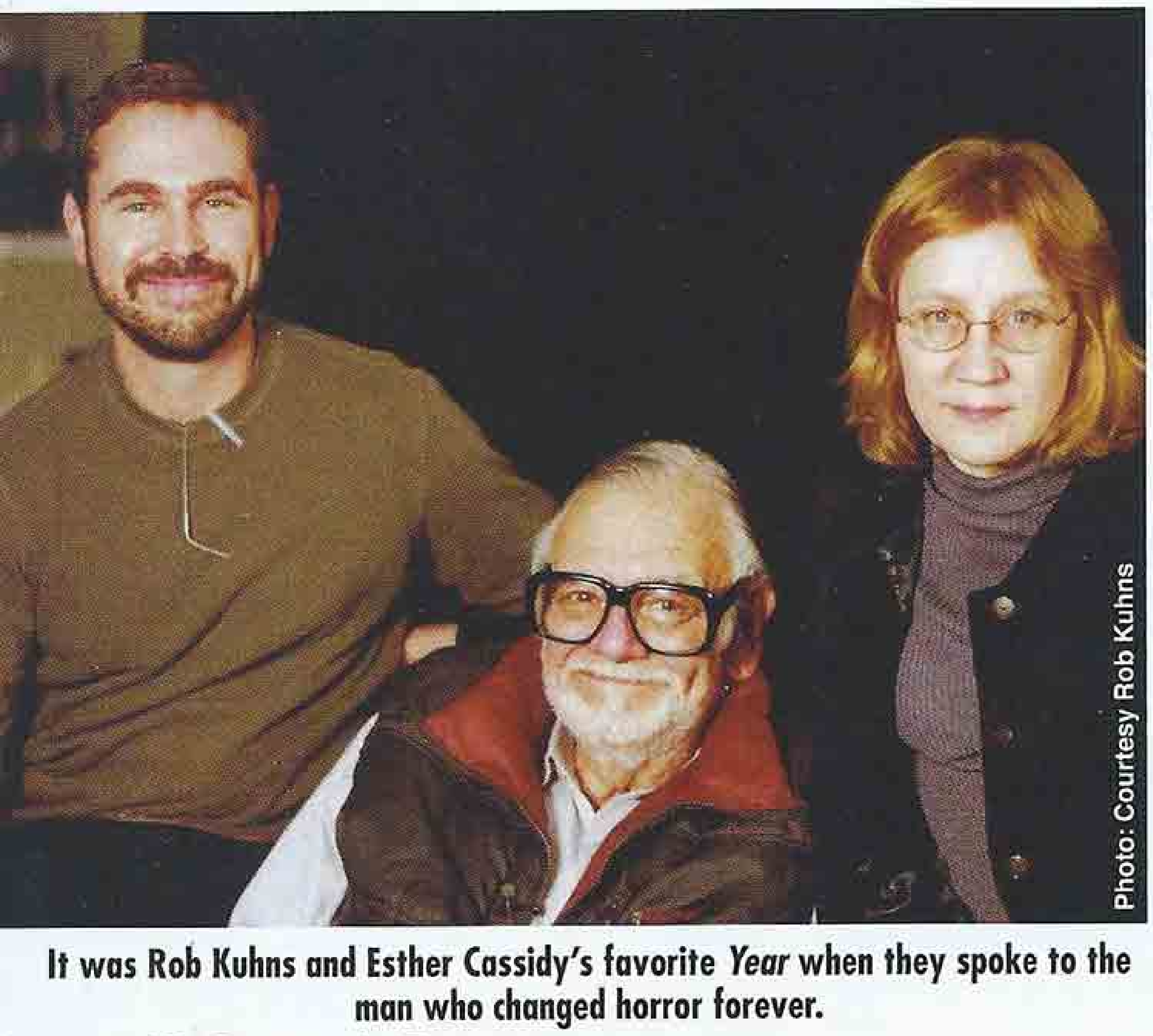


Photo: Courtesy Rob Kuhns

It was Rob Kuhns and Esther Cassidy's favorite *Year* when they spoke to the man who changed horror forever.

"I started to weave in this history, and the documentary evolved into something much richer than the 'making of' I originally envisioned," he continues. "In the end, I wanted to put *Night* in a historical context and show today's viewers the cultural landscape it came out of. I wanted to present it as both an audacious indie film that bucked Hollywood and an expression of the counterculture. While I certainly hope Romero and zombie fans will dig this movie, I'm very much hoping it will also appeal to a mainstream audience—people who might be surprised how meaningful a horror film can be."

To that end, Kuhns found a number of other voices to speak for *Night*'s significance. These include filmmakers Gale Anne Hurd (who has contributed to its legacy with *The Walking Dead*) and Larry Fessenden, who signed on as executive producer. "I have always been a fan of David Skal's book *The Monster Show*, which places 100 years of horror films in the greater context of U.S. history, showing how the genre is an expression of the nation's anxieties," Fessenden says. "Rob's film does that with Romero's classic, and you can really feel how *Night of the Living Dead* was of its time, and ahead of its time."

Others who appear in *Year* include Mark Harris, author of the '68-cinema study *Pictures at a Revolution*, *Shock Value* author Jason Zinoman and Chiz Schultz, producer of *Ganja and Hess*, which starred *Night* hero Duane Jones. "Chiz discusses how revolutionary it was to not only cast a black actor, Duane Jones, in the lead, but to never mention his race once in the script. He also produced Harry Belafonte's TV specials in the late '60s, and was a first-hand witness to the racism of the time. In the rehearsal for one of Belafonte's shows, singer Petula Clark touched Belafonte's arm, which caused a sponsor to demand there be no physical contact between them. Race and the casting of Jones is a major theme, and is discussed by all of the interviewees."

Night itself became a subject of controversy after Roger Ebert, in an article for the *Chicago Sun-Times*—also reprinted in *Reader's Digest*—reacted with horror that young children were being dropped off by their parents to see such a graphic, terrifying movie. (Ebert has clarified since that the piece wasn't intended as an attack on the film itself, which he admires.) One section of *Year of the Living Dead* reveals how times have changed:

"We shot a sequence in the Bronx, where Romero grew up, at a summer literacy class for fifth and sixth graders taught by Christopher Cruz, a friend of Larry Fessenden's," reveals Kuhns, who is currently in post on *Year*. "He used *Night* and lessons in filmmaking to help teach these kids literacy skills, which was surprising enough. But what really surprised us was how these kids responded to *Night*. They wanted to see it again and again, especially the scene where little Karen Cooper slaughters her mother with a garden trowel. They loved discussing the zombie mythology, and the ethics of whether Ben should or should not have shot Harry Cooper near the end of the film. It was an amazing contrast to the kids Roger Ebert wrote about in 1968—when they watched the movie, it traumatized them for life. Clearly, the norms of our society, and the bars for what's acceptable, are significantly different."

—Michael Gingold

SEASON OF THE WITCH

You don't know Jack's wife

For a long time, I resisted watching *Season of the Witch*.

Though I'm a die-hard horror fan who sucks up all forms of genre-based entertainment, I had heard reports that *Season of the Witch* was nothing but a domestic drama with a few elements of witchcraft thrown in, so it stayed below my Romero radar. Then, in grad school, I took a class on cult films. The professor, who was from the Feminism department, made *Season of the Witch* required viewing for all students, and I radically changed my tune. This film is far more than just a domestic drama. It is a smart and poignant feminist statement with a powerful cast and some very subjective, surreal dream sequences.

Season of the Witch, a.k.a. *Jack's Wife* and *Hungry Wives*, was Romero's third film. Having then just finished the romantic, silly and *very* '60s psychedelic romp *There's Always Vanilla*, he seemed to be drifting from the horror genre with which he made his name with *Night of the Living Dead*. But *Season of the Witch* bridges several genres, from drama to action to "chick flick," and it is deeply rooted in horror. Romero's script tells the story of Joan (Jan White), a bored and ignored housewife who develops an increasingly obsessive interest in witchcraft. Suddenly, her life is forever changed as she finds herself more confident, strong and sexually comfortable.

Though cloaked in the veil of the supernatural, this movie proves to be similar to many other Romero films—an allegory wrapped in a horror plot. *Night* ushered in ideologies on family, race and authority figures; *Martin* gave religion a working over; *Dawn of the Dead* critiqued capitalism. *Season of the Witch* is Romero's feminist parable; even his original title *Jack's Wife* screams feminist agenda. Our protagonist isn't even addressed by name in the film; she is just, indeed, Jack's wife. The opening even features a dream sequence where Joan is forced to wear a dog collar and is kept in a kennel while her husband is away on business. Yes! Point out the oppressive dominant patriarchal paradigm, George! Joan then spends the entire remainder of the movie obliterating it, while it still provides the regimented amount of '70s indie exploitation themes of the time, including witchcraft, sexual adventures, masturbation, drugs, Satanism, murder and abstract imagery.

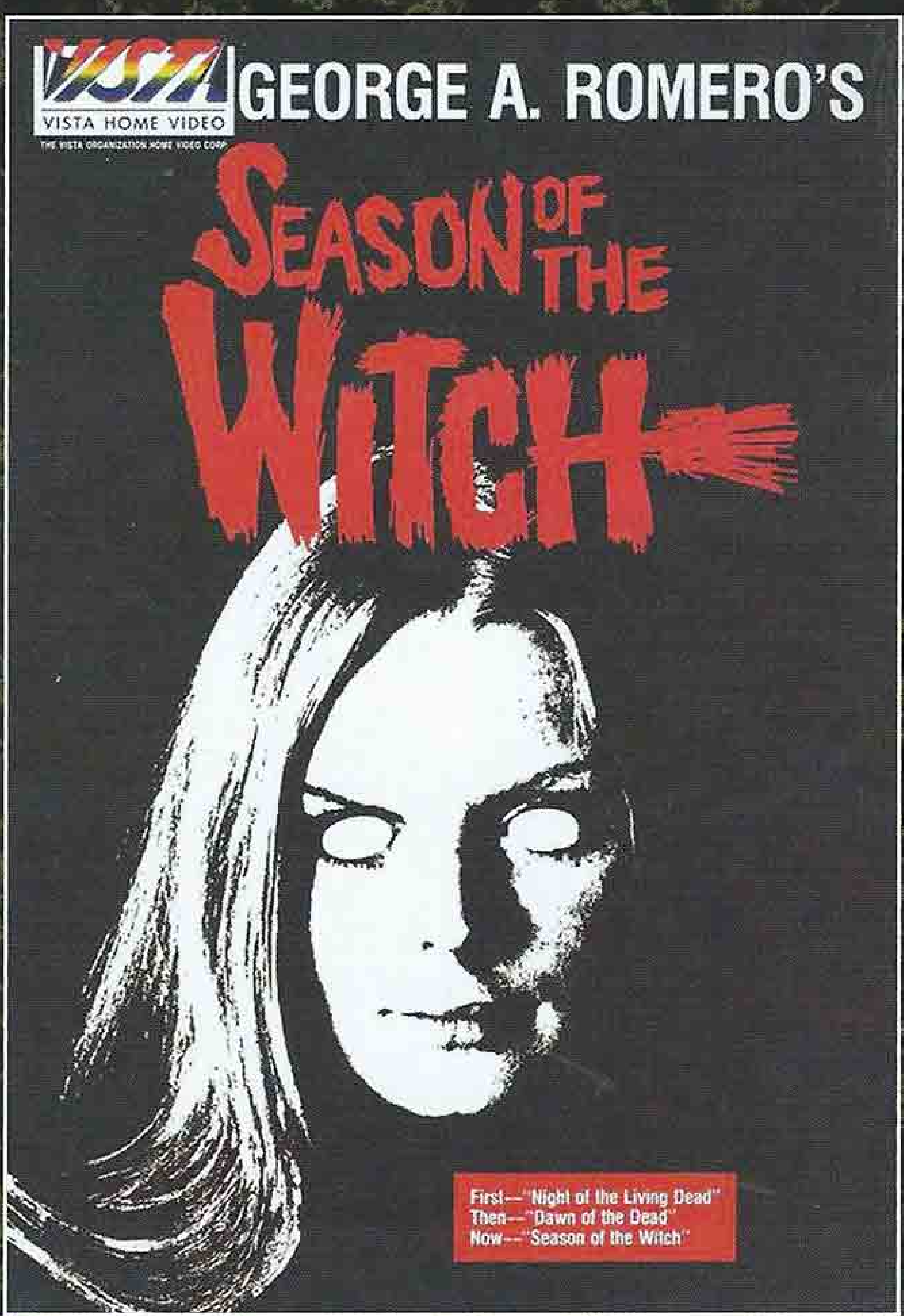
So if *Season of the Witch* is such a subversive, smart and topical movie, why didn't it achieve the fame of Romero's other flicks? Well, there are multiple reasons, but they ultimately serve to make *Season of the Witch* more charming in this writer's eyes. First, it's a slow burn. And it's driven from the beginning to subvert oppressive males. This is not done with force or ass-kicking action, but much more through the mental changes taking place within Joan. A lot happens, and the film has much to say, but Romero swaps out terror-filled scenes of cannibal zombies in lieu of setpieces with Joan analyzing her life and surroundings. It's a mental trip, but a very dry one.

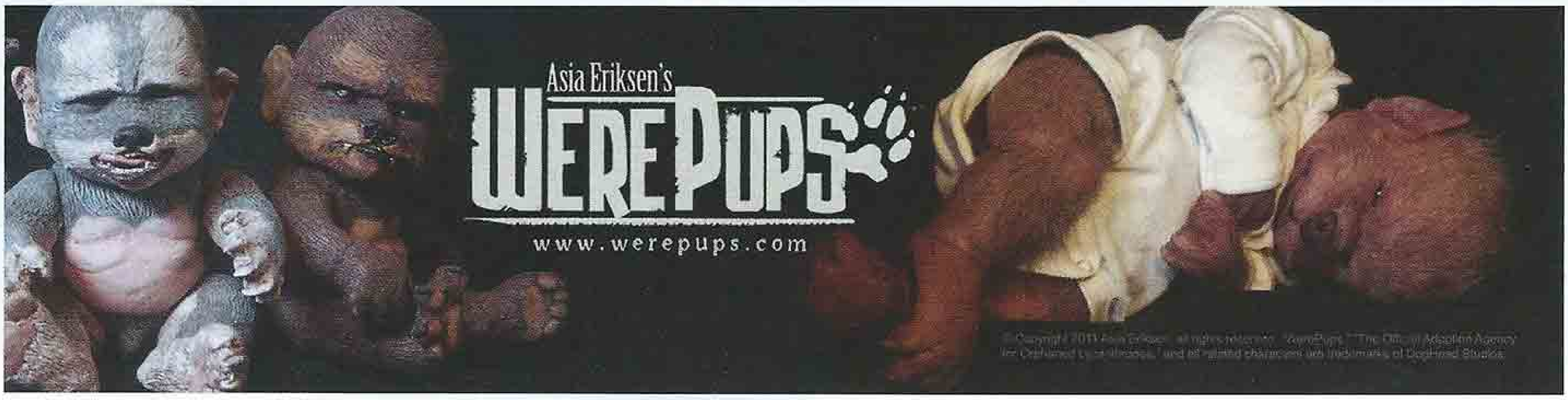
Second, our heroine is not exactly the ideal person to guide a film's central journey. She is weak, unattractively frumpy and very complacent. Yet she is also the only character we are allowed to follow. For much of the movie, the audience feels almost uncomfortable watching Joan make bad decisions and get pushed around by her family and the world at large. This feeling changes as Joan changes, and the audience evolves with her. But in order to get to Joan's strongest moments, you have to go through her weakest.

The film also suffered a few identity crises when it was first released. Originally running 130 minutes, it was cut to 90 after soft box-office response, and then there were the name changes. While it retained the *Jack's Wife* moniker in the UK, the movie was rechristened *Hungry Wives* in the U.S. (even though there's only one wife) to try to sell it as a T&A exploitation flick. It was then renamed *Season of the Witch* to play off the Donovan song of the same name that is used on the soundtrack.

Season is one of the few films that Romero has admitted he is not altogether pleased with. The shoot was plagued with budget problems and other production snags, and the director has said that out of all his pictures, this is the one he wants to remake. Perhaps *Jack's Wife* is destined for reincarnation…

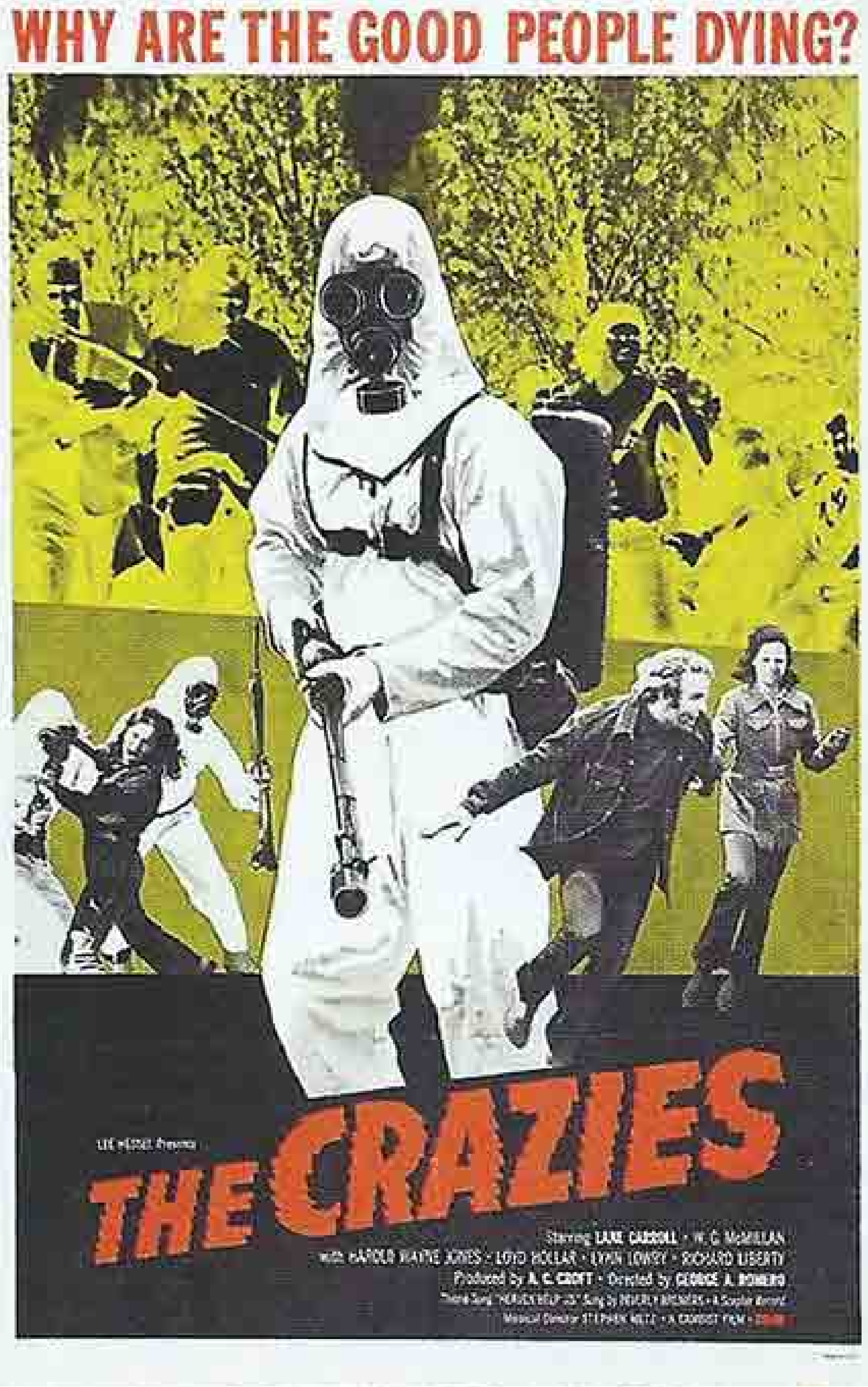
—*Bekah McKendry*


VISTA
VISTA HOME VIDEO
THE VISTA ORGANIZATION HOME VIDEO CORP.
GEORGE A. ROMERO'S
SEASON OF THE WITCH
First—"Night of the Living Dead"
Then—"Dawn of the Dead"
Now—"Season of the Witch"



THE CRAZIES

SCIENCE AND SOCIETY GONE MAD


WHY ARE THE GOOD PEOPLE DYING?
LEE HESSEL Presents
THE CRAZIES
Starring LANE CARROLL • W. G. McMILLAN
with HAROLD WAYNE JONES • LOYD HOLLAR • LYNN LOWRY • RICHARD LIBERTY
Produced by A. C. CROFT • Directed by GEORGE A. ROMERO

In between *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead*, the George A. Romero tipping-point movie where he began overtly mixing political subtext with bloody genre trappings was 1973's *The Crazies* (a.k.a. *Code Name: Trixie*). Despite some ragged technical edges, it remains one of his most intriguing works.

Even today, the film's imagery still has the power to disturb. Who else would open a film with two kids being burned to disfigurement in a house fire set by their raving-mad father after discovering their mother dead and bloody in her bed? Or feature an old lady repeatedly stabbing a soldier with her knitting needle, then continuing to work with her yarn? The theme of the disintegrating nuclear family that began in *Night* continues here, with not only that opening scene, but also the outrageously distasteful rape of a daughter by her father in an abandoned house.

While *Night* presented its embattled, arguing principals as a microcosm of a socially and politically turbulent world, the larger scale of *The Crazies* gives us a glimpse—sometimes horrific, often darkly funny—not only of civilians like us just trying to cope, but also the collapse of the entire support system of government and military officials who've been put into place to protect us. This collection of incompetents are more interested in numbers than individuals, or even just getting the simplest supplies to function properly.

There's a playful camaraderie between the performers playing the three leads that feels real and unforced, as they go about their business of being volunteer firemen and a nurse. These characters have a convoluted history together as friends, which makes things even sadder when everything begins to unravel, making this one of Romero's most emotionally involving films. At the climax, as the pregnant nurse longingly extends her fingers between the concrete cinder blocks the protagonist has arranged to keep her hidden and safe for the night, the little giggles she lets out that betray her presence to the soldiers, as the Trixie virus begins to ruin her mind, is one of the most heartbreaking moments in the director's filmography.

Of all Romero's early movies, this is the one that best represents a quote he's said in a few different ways: "I'd rather have 100 lousy shots to work with than one great shot I can't edit." Without the use of a single dolly take, *The Crazies*' fast-paced cutting and framing convey a world of energetic screen motion that keeps it moving at an exciting pace.

What has always differentiated Romero from his more craven and less talented contemporaries is his ability to make the Other—whether it be a flesheating ghoul, an out-of-control monkey or, in the case of this film, the anonymous hordes of gas-mask-wearing soldiers rounding up citizens after martial law has been declared—sympathetic. When we finally meet a couple of these young soldiers without their masks, they are exactly the kind of baby-faced kids who were being sent to die in Vietnam at the time—and probably also the exact same age as the audience sitting in drive-ins watching the film. Part of what makes Romero so special as a filmmaker is that he's not afraid to make things a bit more complicated than they first appear to be.

As in all his early films, *The Crazies* demonstrates Romero's skill at finding appropriate library-music tracks to accent what's happening on screen—feeling as if it was written specifically for the film at hand—and making the movie feel a little bit bigger in scope than it really is, a trait he has in common with Stanley Kubrick. His use of "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" feels like a knowing acknowledgment of the tribute to *Dr. Strangelove* he created with this film—albeit a drive-in-friendly version.

The strength of Romero's world view is that in *The Crazies*, he nails a basic human truth with his $1.98 budget that even Kubrick couldn't achieve with the considerably costlier and higher-echelon cast of *Strangelove*: The future of mankind will not be decided by high-powered politicians and generals sitting inside a beautifully designed Ken Adam set, but by a couple of lowly bureaucrats in ill-fitting suits with lousy haircuts who are just trying to eat their lunch and deal with the malfunctioning technology provided by the lowest-bidding supplier. *The Crazies* seems more horrifyingly relevant with each passing year.

—*Scooter McCrae*

***The Crazies* was the first time since *Night of the Living Dead* that Romero spilled serious blood on screen.**

LOWRY AND THE LUNATICS

Lynn Lowry was the picture of innocence corrupted when ***The Crazies*** overtook her town.

Though she only appeared in a handful of 1970s horror films, veteran actress Lynn Lowry made sure that each and every time she appeared on screen, it counted. With her preternatural, elfin beauty (which has aged extremely well, we might add), Lowry graced such pictures as the drive-in classic *I Drink Your Blood*, Radley Metzger's beloved bisexual softcore romp *Score*, David Cronenberg's delirious first feature *Shivers* and Paul Schrader's erotic remake of *Cat People*. Recently, she has appeared in a new spate of low-budget pictures, and in almost every case, her very presence seems to elevate the material she graces.

But her collaboration with George A. Romero in his early classic *The Crazies* is certainly one of her most prominent. She co-stars as Kathy, a girl driven mad by the outbreak who inexplicably has sex with her own father (played by *Day of the Dead*'s Richard Liberty) and has one of cinema's most bizarre monologue moments before being gunned down like a dog. She reprised her bonkers role in the 2010 remake as a bike-riding Baby Jane, a brief but notable cameo that served as a reminder of just how eye-catching a figure she can be. We spoke to the lovely Lowry recently about those days dancing with Romero's maniacs…

FANGORIA: You've spoken before about your early days in film, in the 1970s, and how every guy was sort of on the make. We can't imagine this to be true of Romero.

LYNN LOWRY: No, you're right, George was an exception. A total pro. He was terrific and was always a complete gentleman, and still is. I say that because I see him at horror conventions all the time. We actually screened *The Crazies* in Long island not too long ago, and he demanded that I be on stage with him to introduce it. He got up there and said, "Where's Lynn? Where's Lynn? Get her up here!" It was so sweet.

And when we shot *The Crazies*, he was just as sensitive and easygoing. He cast that film so well that everyone knew what they had to do, and really, the only time I had a problem with him was on the day we filmed my death.

FANG: A fantastic scene. Was that monologue scripted?

LOWRY: No! It was most certainly not! I asked George about what I was supposed to do, you know, and he said to just go up on that hill and be crazy! In the remake, there was the different level of crazy, of course, and that was illustrated by the varying intensities of the makeup. But George would just say, "Be crazier, be crazier"…and I was!

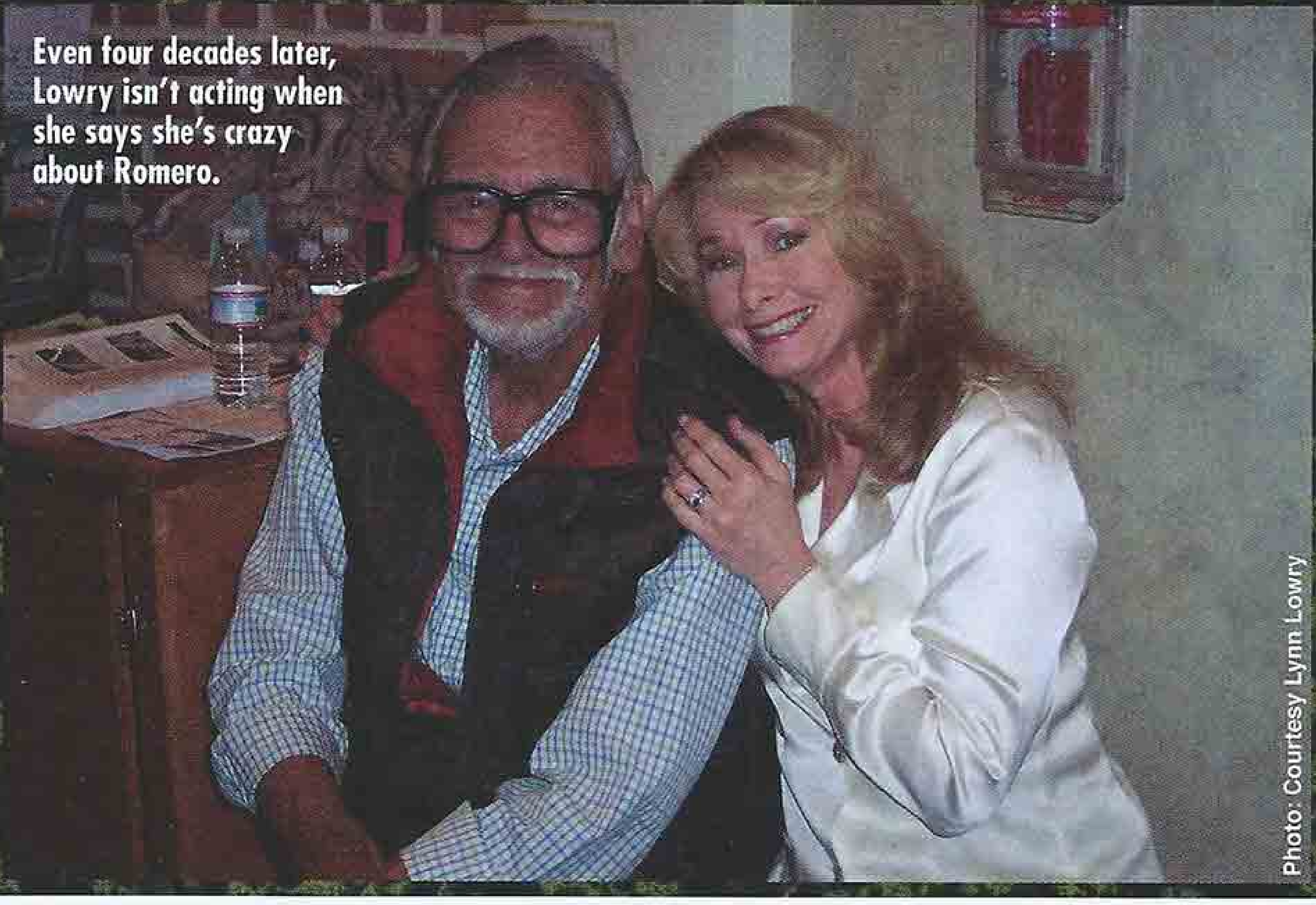
FANG: Which in your estimation is more effective—the original film's approach to madness or the more visual technique in the remake?

LOWRY: Oh, the first is more effective because you have to really act—you have to find that in you and bring it out. You have no prosthetic crutch to lean on. I like the second film, though. It's fun, but it's not disturbing. You don't talk about it later. I mean, [director] Breck Eisner wouldn't put our [original] characters in the film at all; he said they would never touch anything where a father has sex with or rapes his daughter.

FANG: Back to your death scene: When you finally are gunned down, instead of "going crazier," you just say, "Oh."

LOWRY: And that was why I had trouble with George that day. I wanted to die and scream and crawl to the soldiers and cry and scream some more, and George said, "No, I just want you to turn around and say, 'Oh.' " I was like, "No, no, no! That's so lame, George," and he said, "No, Lynn, that's what I want." Now, years later, I understand why he did it, and it's perfect. After all the horror that has come before, that's such a simple, pure reaction; all that this girl was, the sweetness and innocence she had before the disease took her over, comes back. My fans often say it's their favorite moment in any of my films.

—*Chris Alexander*



Even four decades later, Lowry isn't acting when she says she's crazy about Romero.

Photo: Courtesy Lynn Lowry

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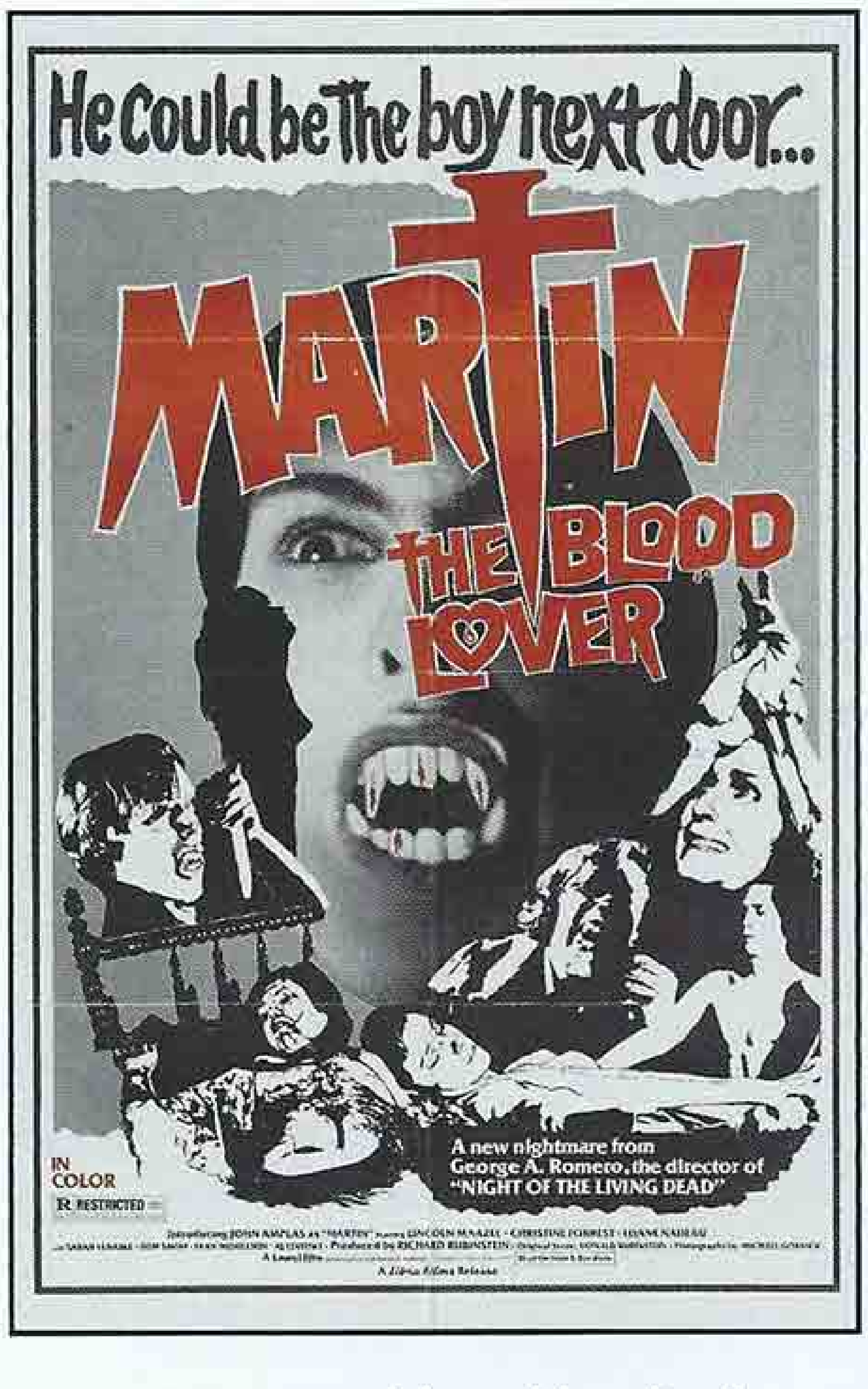
THE UNTOLD ORIGIN
LOUIS J. PECSI

MARTIN

Inner view of the "vampire"


He Could be The boy next door...
MARTIN
THE BLOOD LOVER
IN COLOR
R RESTRICTED
A new nightmare from George A. Romero, the director of "NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD"

Vampire films have long been a cornerstone of the horror genre. Most of them follow the same basic premise: bloodsucker comes to town, seduces/feeds on the townfolk, fearless vampire killers assemble to vanquish their supernatural foe. It is as predictable as the tides, and few are bold enough to break out of that mold. One film that did was George A. Romero's 1976 horror/drama *Martin*.

To put the film into context: Romero's groundbreaking *Night of the Living Dead* had come out eight years prior. The gifted independent filmmaker followed that up with *There's Always Vanilla*, *Season of the Witch* and *The Crazies*, then two sports documentaries in 1974. These had varying degrees of success, but with the exception of *The Crazies*, *Martin* was the first time the director harked back to the genius (and potential) of *Night*.

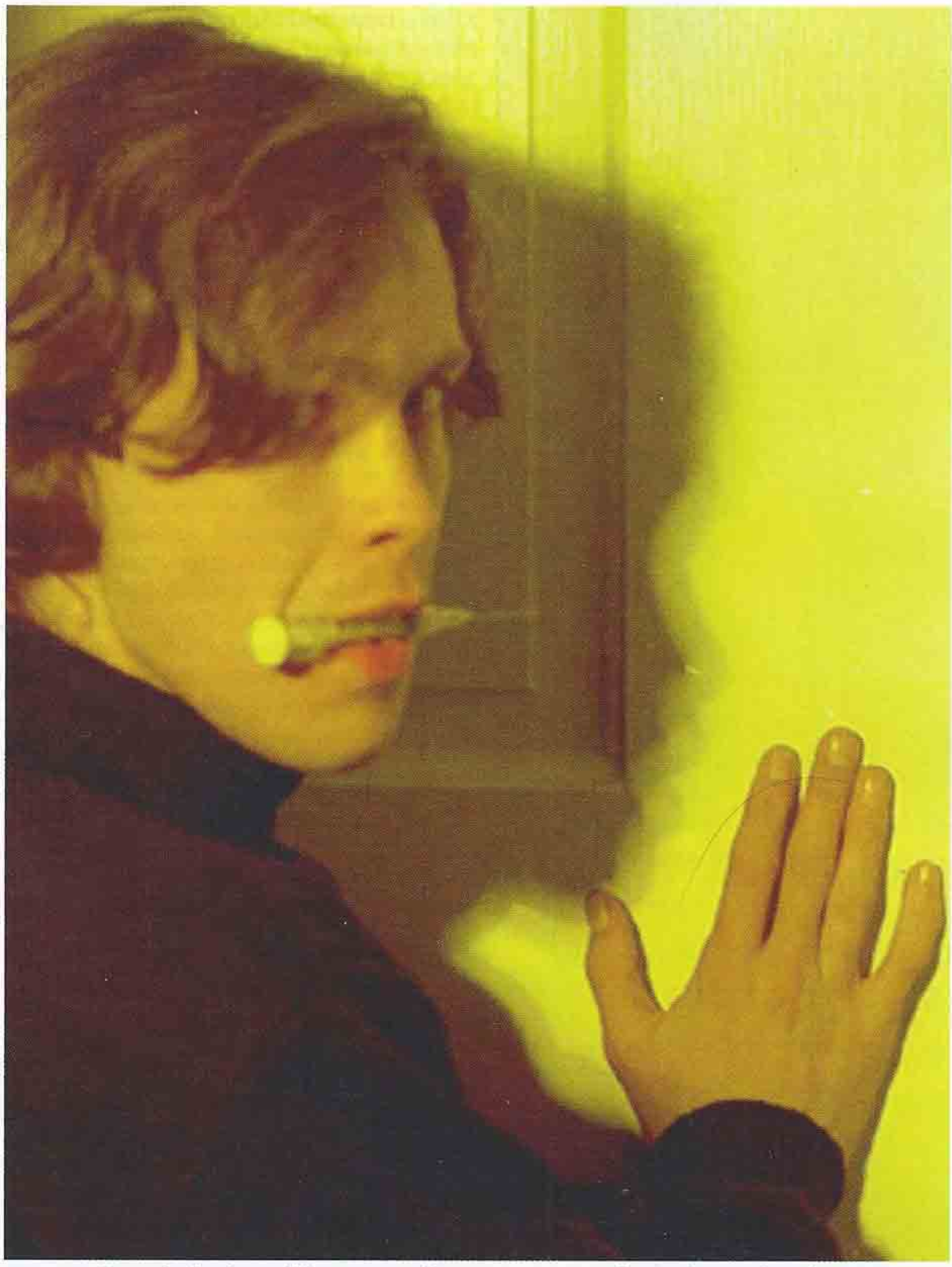
What made *Martin* different was that it turned the age-old convention of the vampire film on its head. The central character (played by John Amplas; see page 18) is by no means your typical vampire. Unlike the charismatic villains of yore, this young man is unassuming, fragile and eminently vulnerable. In fact, throughout the film, one is never quite sure whether Martin is truly one of the undead or merely a kid suffering from serious delusions engendered by a family elder's imposed mythos. At one point, Martin's cousin Christina (Christine Forrest, soon to be Mrs. Romero) says to her ultra-religious grandfather Tata Cuda (Lincoln Maazel), "He's unbalanced. He's mad…and you and those books have driven him to it!… Of course, the books… the books will show it. Those damned books. They should be burned! That's where you get your horrible ideas."

At its core, though, *Martin* is about addiction, and the feverish netherworld the addict must exist in. Martin's world is a claustrophobic realm of isolation, suspicion and utter hopelessness all wrapped in a decidedly melancholic tone that slowly but surely ratchets up the inherent sense of doom.

As the film begins, Romero silently doles out pertinent bits of information, as Martin and his first victim board a train separately and Martin begins his preparations. Short shots, cut quickly, create a mosaic that slowly increases the prevailing sense of dread. His initial inept attack immediately displays the dichotomy between that which the audience has come to expect from a vampire film, and what they get. There's a distinct conflict between what Martin fantasizes as he enters the woman's room and the cold reality (beauty vs. cold cream) he finds there. The attack is hamfisted, and he's able to subdue his victim almost in spite of himself, and only with the help of his needle.

Once Martin arrives at his destination of Braddock, PA, we meet the imposing Cuda, the personification of Olde World paranoia and religious superstition. Martin finds himself in a town that is slowly dying; as plants close and people move on, the neighborhood is a moribund shell…much like he is. A melancholy tone permeates every frame of the film, and even the sporadic scenes of happiness with Mrs. Santini (Elayne Nadeau) can't help but be tainted by it. Intuitively, we know this is a place of hopelessness, and

***Martin*'s demises are as sad as they are scary.**



***Martin* broke the mold by giving audiences a vampire (John Amplas) without fangs.**

every relationship that the boy forges is doomed. The one exception involves Christina, who signifies hope and the desire for something better. She knows instinctually that she must leave—even if her only way out is with a man she does not love—before the cloying environment steals what life she has in her.

We soon meet Martin's second target (Sara Venable), a woman whose marriage is obviously unfulfilling and who is infused with her own quiet desperation. Martin comes to her in the night while her husband (played by producer Richard Rubinstein) is away. However, the boy is surprised to find that she is not alone—she is having an affair. What follows is an exquisitely cut sequence as Martin plays cat and mouse within the confines of the house with the lover (porn actor Roger Caine, a.k.a. Al Levitsky) and the woman herself. The setpiece culminates with Martin first dispatching the man in what was, for its time, a brutal Tom Savini-crafted scene in which he graphically impales the man's throat with a stick, and then returning to the woman for "the sexy stuff." It's shot and edited with a master's hand, and the inherent sense of dread is comparable to anything done by Alfred Hitchcock, Roman Polanski or Brian De Palma.

Next, we are introduced to the forlorn Mrs. Santini, who is barren and deeply affected by what she perceives to be the insignificance of her life. Sensing a sympathetic soul, the woman is drawn to Martin and their relationship deepens—not due to any real attraction, but because she desperately needs someone to validate her existence. The experience is an empty one for Mrs. Santini, and that feeling of emptiness informs her entire character and forms the film's emotional core.

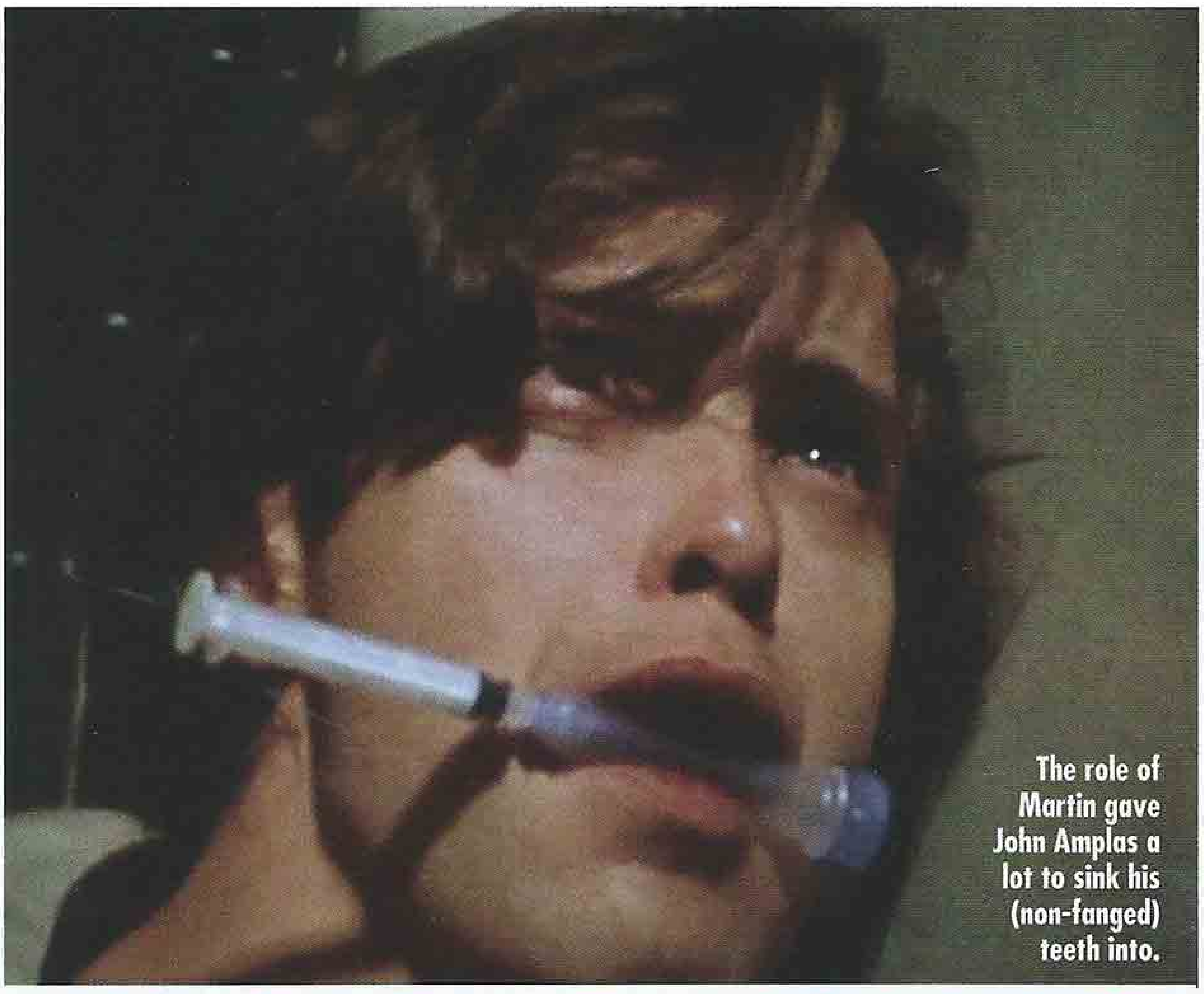
As time goes on, Martin finds that, because of his sexual relationship with Mrs. Santini, he has difficulty choosing his next victim and admits to "getting shaky, so shaky [he's] afraid [he] might make a mistake." He attacks some homeless men and, as if by his own prediction, is almost caught by police. As he runs from them, he interrupts a drug deal, and a shootout erupts. The sequence is gritty and dirty, and accelerates the downward spiral leading to the film's conclusion.

Ultimately, Mrs. Santini takes her own life by slitting her wrists in a bathtub. Hers is the sole death in the film in which Martin has no complicity, but it is also the one that seals his fate. When Cuda hears of it, he immediately assumes Martin has killed the woman, and must be punished for it. In an iconic scene, Martin awakens to the sight of the old man standing over him, armed with a sharpened stake. Cuda reminds Martin of his promise to destroy him should he ever "take" someone from the town. With that, the stake is pounded into the boy's chest, killing him. As the credits begin to roll, the camera drifts off with the image of the old man quietly burying the body in the backyard and salting the earth.

In the end, *Martin* serves as a sad poem in contrast to the extravagances of Romero's other movies; its pace is more contemplative, more unhurried, than their frenetic tempo. Romero has said many times that *Martin* is his favorite of all of his films; it is certainly the most moving and the most thought-provoking.

—Thom Carnell

Religion is no cure for this blood-drinker, as Tata Cuda (Lincoln Maazel, right) will find out.



The role of Martin gave John Amplas a lot to sink his (non-fanged) teeth into.

UNDEAD ANGST

Actor John Amplas remembers his days and nights as Romero's most sympathetic "monster."

By THOM CARNELL

To say that John Amplas' characterization in the title role of *Martin* is born out of subtlety and vulnerability would be a bit of an understatement. His is a portrayal which, more than anything else, displays an innate understanding of loneliness and how those different from the rest of us can pass through life almost unnoticed. Having worked with Romero over a number of years in several films (also including *Dawn of the Dead*, *Knightriders*, *Creepshow* and *Day of the Dead*), few are able to share more insights about the director than Amplas. From the early days in Pittsburgh, the actor has observed Romero at work, was a part of his process—and starred in what is arguably one of the greatest vampire films of all time.

FANGORIA: How did you meet Romero and land the role of Martin?

JOHN AMPLAS: I was a senior in college and doing a play called *Philemon* at the Pittsburgh Playhouse. George happened to come and see that production, and a month or two later, he gave me a call and simply asked me to do the role. He must have seen something I was doing that he liked, because the role was originally written for an older actor. But after seeing my performance, he decided he would change that and rewrote the script. It was that simple. I'd never had such an easy audition [*laughs*].

FANG: What do you think are Romero's strengths as a director?

AMPLAS: Number one is that he's a terrific writer, and at his best when he directs his own material. He does quite well when it's his vision, when it's his idea and he's the primary creator. George is a bright, intelligent guy. He's able to weave in all the sociopolitical stuff that's going on in his head, and get that into his material.

FANG: Was there a large film community in Pittsburgh at the time?

AMPLAS: I don't know if it was large, but it was burgeoning. George's company really was the forerunner of more and more films coming into Pittsburgh. Up until that time, Hollywood wasn't really taking any notice, but shortly after George pro-

This is one of the few moments when Martin is only playing at being a bloodsucker.

duced and directed three or four films here, the word started to get out. We had a lot of guys—who are still working here—who were with WQED [the local PBS station]. So we had a lot of technicians, and George was able to utilize them. Now, our IATSE [International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees] guys are working all the time.

FANG: Was it a matter of Romero gathering a group of the most agreeable people and friends, or was it going after the most technically proficient people in the area?

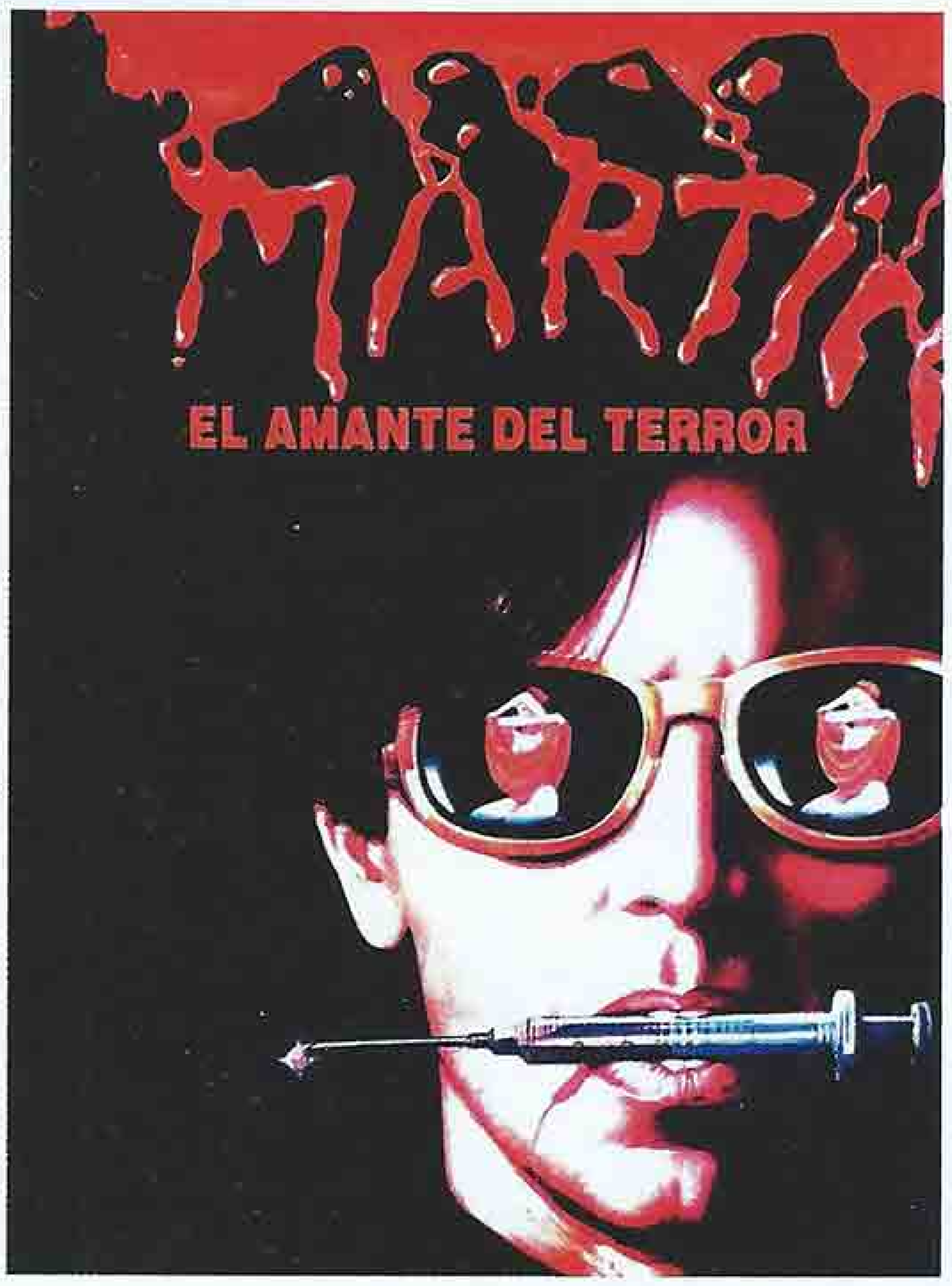
AMPLAS: It was a little bit of both, really. I mean, it was friends who kind of formed the nucleus, then friends of friends were brought in when necessary. Working with George is a terrific experience because what he is able to create, just by means of his personality, is a family atmosphere where everybody's interested and wants to pitch in. As hard as the work can become, it's still more fun to be involved and working together with people who really like what they're doing. We *wanted* to make movies, and it was a real focus for everybody involved, and that was a result of George's ability to create an atmosphere that was conducive to do so. George is an extremely personable guy and a terrific leader in that regard. Plus, he's a very quiet man. He's not in any way overstated in terms of his work on the set, but he's well-prepared and has good people surrounding him.

FANG: I'm curious about your take on *Martin*, on the character and how you see all that now through the prism of time.

AMPLAS: Number one, I'm surprised and also gratified by the fact that the film has stood the test of time. Over a period of 35 years, this little movie is still finding new audiences. There are people my age and older who have a fondness for the film, but there are now also younger people who are seeing it for the very first time, and are jumping on the bandwagon and touting it as one of George's best movies. So, the ability of *Martin* to still be popular and have the cult following it does is remarkable to me. I've been grateful for people continually finding this movie and liking it so much, and having an appreciation for George's work and, I'd have to say, for my own. It was a seminal time for me when the film was made, and it has been an important aspect of my life. I don't know that there are too many people who can say that about work they've done.

"At once, Martin is both empathetic and pathetic, and totally a sociopath. It's all kind of mixed in together."

My take on the film itself is that it is not so much a horror film as it is a psychological thriller. That's kind of what I'd thought about it from the beginning. In many ways, I believe the isolation Martin lives in and his inability sometimes to connect with other people, not knowing how, the fact that he has been passed from family member to family member... In many ways, I immediately understood that, only because of my own background. I came from a kind of broken family and did not grow up with my own parents, and early on was passed around a little bit. So there were things that perhaps—not consciously, but subconsciously—may have emanated from my own personal experience into this role. There was, for whatever reason I can't fully explain intellectually, an affinity there that I seemed to understand, and that George felt was appropriate during the filming. So at once, Martin is both empathetic and pathetic, and totally a sociopath [*laughs*]. It's all kind of mixed in together. Maybe some of it comes from a naiveté about Martin that I probably carried with me as well.



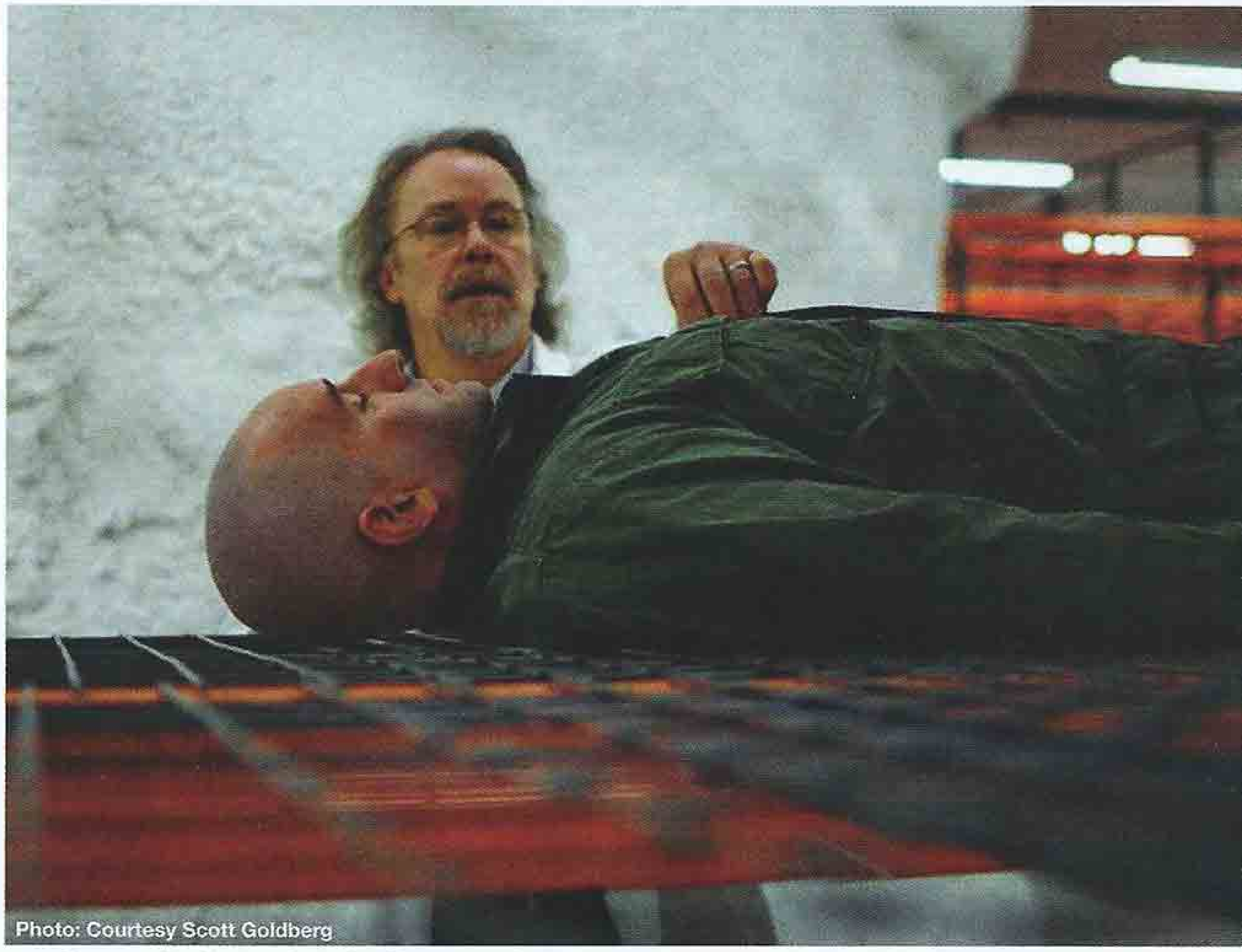


Photo: Courtesy Scott Goldberg

Today, Amplas keeps the indie-filmmaking faith by taking part in Pittsburgh-area projects like *The Three* (with Jesse Lee Lafferty).

I was lucky in that regard; not a lot of actors have the opportunity to just step into a role and already have a connection with it without having to do a lot of studying and background research. Whatever was on the page, I was fortunate enough to understand and transfer that—which is what actors ultimately have to do. We have to *do* the action. We have to *show* the action.

FANG: What do you hope people will get out of viewing *Martin*?

AMPLAS: I want them to know that to create a good film with an interesting point of view takes care, it takes love, it takes people who are appreciative and want to work in the craft without trying to make a movie they can immediately capitalize on. I believe that is very worthwhile in the business of making films; we have to get back to making small, independent movies rather than movies that will only bring us money. I would like people to see *Martin* and appreciate the craft that went into making it, both from the filmmaking side—George's side—and the actors' side. It doesn't take a lot of money to make a good film and to make a good point. The craft is more important than the commercial aspect. I think people who watch *Martin* and actually look at George's abilities in terms of filmmaking and writing will see that you can make a really good movie and not have to spend millions and millions of dollars on it.

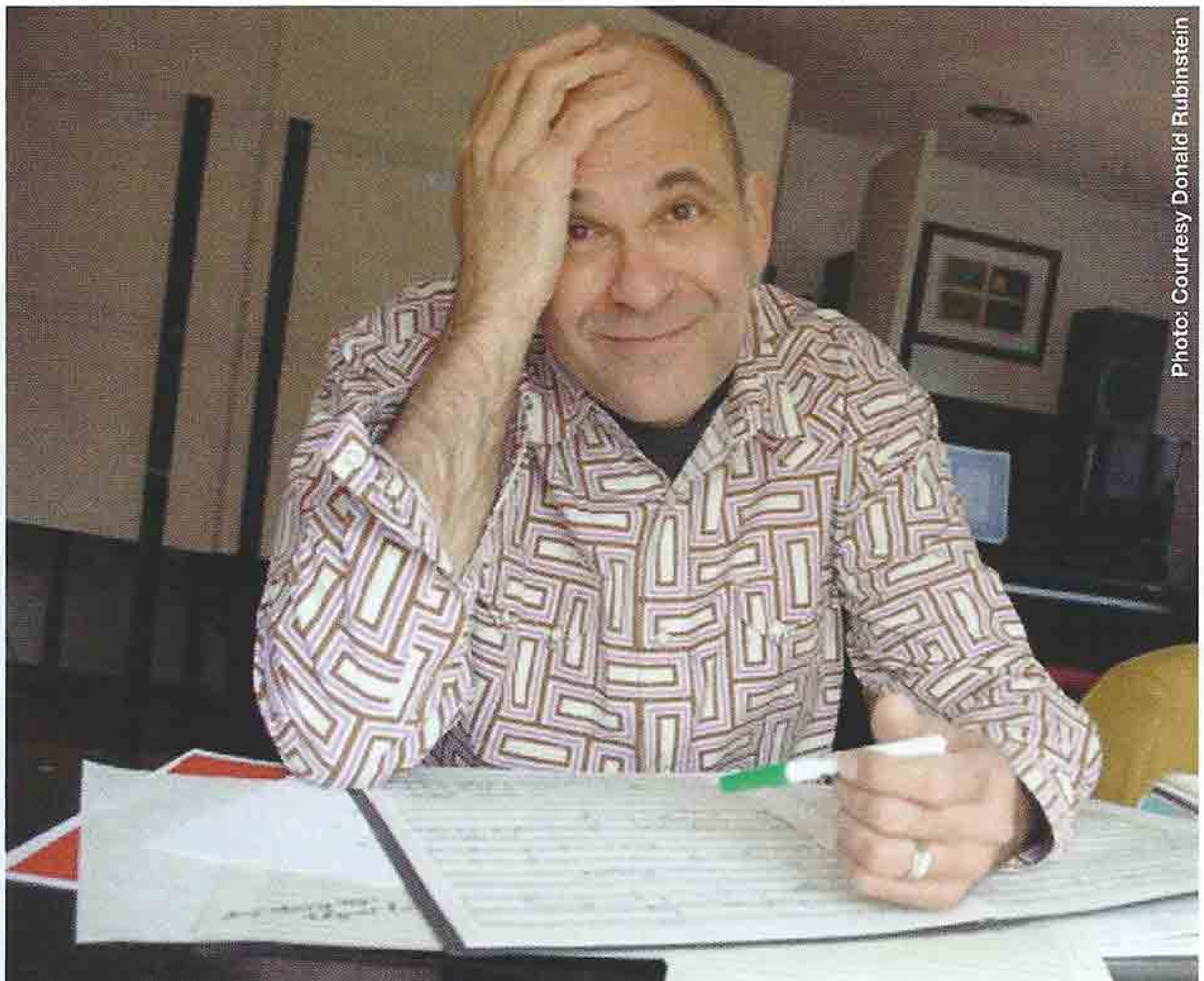


Photo: Courtesy Donald Rubinstein

DONALD RUBINSTEIN: The Humanity of Horror

The composer's music gave unique voices to three of Romero's most unusual pictures.

By SCOOTER McCRAE

Composer Donald Rubinstein is a man of many talents. Besides being celebrated as a singer/songwriter, musician and multimedia artist who has released 23 CDs and had museum shows all over the United States, he's best-known to FANGORIA readers as the man who composed the scores for three George A. Romero films: *Martin*, *Knightriders* and *Bruiser*. While *Martin* and *Knightriders* are considered by the director himself and many fans to be among his best films, *Bruiser* is still a contentious title among Romero-lovers. But there's no question that no matter what your stance may be on any of these titles, Rubinstein's music for all three are idiosyncratic, one-of-a-kind scores that stand apart in the genre, not only as effective film music but great compositions in their own right. Rubinstein took some time out during a particularly busy period to talk about working with one of our favorite directors and shed some light on his creative process.

FANGORIA: You've gotten to score Romero's most nontraditional films, all three of which he has also claimed to be his favorites at one point or another. Were you attracted to these projects because of their off-kilter takes on their genres?

DONALD RUBINSTEIN: I was asked to score them and I was attracted to George's immense ability and artistic openness, which suited my own. I was attracted to, and in tune with, their "off-kilter" takes on the genres as well as their original reflections of society.

FANG: How hands-on was Romero during the composing process? Did you talk

It wasn't the children of the night, but Donald Rubinstein making the music for Romero's particular vampire.

Photo: Copyright Trimar

What's scarier—Rubinstein's score for *Bruiser*, or the voices in Henry Creedlow's (Jason Flemyng) head?

about music in an abstract sense, or did he play records for you as examples of what he was looking for?

RUBINSTEIN: Both—George referred me to films and generally conveyed his philosophy through our conversations. I understood him through the scripts as well. They were so well-written. I was excited to be involved with George's approaches and link them with my own. On our first film, *Martin*, I hired a group of musicians and we made scratch tracks of the themes to which George responded. After that, once George and I had established the depth of our creative connection, he was content to hear simple themes via piano and would OK the direction from that. If we were in sync with the thematic lines, he was very open and left me to do my thing. He is a consummate director who understands film in every aspect, including music.

FANG: Do you enjoy the challenge of creating sympathetic music for morally questionable characters, like Martin or Henry Creedlow from *Bruiser*?

RUBINSTEIN: Yes, I have great sympathy and compassion for the trials of being human, and the travails we encounter in our need for respect and love.

FANG: If given the opportunity, would you have liked to score one of Romero's zombie films as well? And if so, what approach would you have taken?

RUBINSTEIN: Yes. For *Dawn of the Dead* I had written complex orchestral sketches, and George was open to me scoring the film, though business decisions dictated otherwise. It's hard to say what approach I would have taken beyond that, though I would relish the opportunity to score such a film with electronic instruments and voice.

FANG: Did you ever see the legendary three-hour cut of *Martin*, or did you only work on the version that exists today?

RUBINSTEIN: Yes, I saw that cut and was both angry and saddened to hear it was stolen!

FANG: On *Knightriders*, did Romero have any idea just how grand and symphonic a score you would end up composing and recording?

RUBINSTEIN: Possibly not, though as I said, George trusted me, and once he was comfortable with the themes, the orchestral rendering became part of that process. We did not have the luxury of "mocking up" the score with orchestral samples and synthesizers at the time, and so George trusted I would go somewhere cool and interesting with it. I simply worked, in excitement and private, to realize a vision.

> **"George has...an extraordinary artistic sense. He creates an atmosphere of creative freedom and defends the same."**

FANG: What was the difference, if any, in working with Romero not only as a composer on this project, but as an actor as well? Was this your first time acting?

RUBINSTEIN: Yes, it was. Initially, George wanted Rick Wakeman to score the film and offered me the onscreen role of musician. However, I eventually became the composer through intense personal lobbying, and possibly because Wakeman fell through for some reason. I "felt" this film in every aspect and deeply wanted to score it. I had the musical background for it.

The acting on screen with Ed Harris came about because Ed and I had become good friends on set and asked to do a scene together. We approached George with the idea, and he immediately took to it. He had some logistics that weren't included in the original script, which he wanted newly explained during the course of the movie. We all discussed it, and then George wrote the scene I did with Ed. It was fun for me and seemed like a natural progression at the time. I had absolutely no idea of "how" to act and tried to watch Ed—whose process was fascinating—and emulate his approach to the best of my ability.

FANG: Was the size of this project a particular challenge? Writing for a symphony orchestra and composing enough music for Romero's longest and, up to that point, most expensive film—did that put an extra burden on the work you were doing?

RUBINSTEIN: Yes, it was taxing. I was composing all the time under a great deal of pressure. We all worked that way. I remember writing some parts in the taxi on the way to the recording session. It was all new to me, though I went at it like a boxer in a heavyweight bout.

FANG: Of the films you've scored for Romero, did you feel this one was closest to your heart? It feels as much like a labor of love for you as for the director.

RUBINSTEIN: I would say that *Martin* was just as deep for me, and possibly *Bruiser* as well. It is hard to separate when one gives all to creation. The act of rendering music to a film is so joyful in its creative birth that I approach all with an innate commitment and reverence. In the sense that *Knightriders* was a very human film—though weren't they all?—I did feel the tug of emotion, and so I mirrored that in my efforts. Also, "living" that film on set as an actor added a real-life component to it. The struggle that the film conveyed was the struggle we were all engaged in.

FANG: *Bruiser* was your first Romero score where you worked with digital synthesizers. Can you talk about the decision to go in that direction?

RUBINSTEIN: It was economics. We did not have the money for an orchestra, and so I filled out parts with synthesizer. That did not bother me, as it's not so much about the materials to me, but the opportunity. I felt the ensemble fit the tenor of the film.

FANG: As this was Romero's first film shot in Canada, did the logistics have any effect on the way you worked together? Was the composing done long-distance, or did you visit the set during production?

RUBINSTEIN: I did visit once, though it was mostly done long-distance. It did create challenges. Although it was possible to work over long distances with musicians in Toronto, the process was not as smooth as it is now, over 10 years later, and there was some disconnect I had to overcome because of it, particularly in rendering the synthesizer parts.

FANG: Romero has said that *Bruiser* was shot in a hurry—did this extend to post-production as well? If so, did if affect your working style?

RUBINSTEIN: Again, it was a challenge, and time spent solving logistics is part of the equation. They can help and hinder, and in this instance did both. I think the logistics of distance, time and the challenges I cited in your last question made it harder and not quite as fluid as I might have liked.

FANG: Has Romero ever attended any of the recording sessions for the films you've worked on?

RUBINSTEIN: Yes, *Bruiser*.

FANG: What was it like having Romero in on that?

RUBINSTEIN: George has an extraordinary musical sense. He has an extraordinary artistic sense. He creates an atmosphere of creative freedom and defends the same. One moment that comes to mind was at the recording session for *Bruiser* in Toronto. I came into town and was working with an ensemble of highly skilled musicians and a conductor I did not know, nor with whom I was necessarily creatively connected. During the session, the conductor asked if I could change some of the "voicings"—registers in which the instruments play—to make it easier to perform and so that it would "sound better." George took me aside and said something to the effect of, "Do whatever you think, man." He encouraged me not to be influenced by the conductor's reservations, but rather go full on with my own approach. It helped. It was about asking the conductor and players to "rise" to the music, rather than compromise a vision.

ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK
George A. Romero's
MARTIN
Music Composed and Conducted by Donald Rubinstein

George knew it all instinctively, and supported me and the music in its most adventurous expression. That's what he wanted, and he trusted me enough, even without knowing the musical particulars, to support me, and so the musical component of the film, in getting there.

FANG: Both *Martin* and *Bruiser* have something of a bluesy/noir sound to them—they both evoke alienation in an unforgiving city environment. The connective musical tissue between them is the hauntingly beautiful, lilting female voice that goes in and out of the music on both scores.

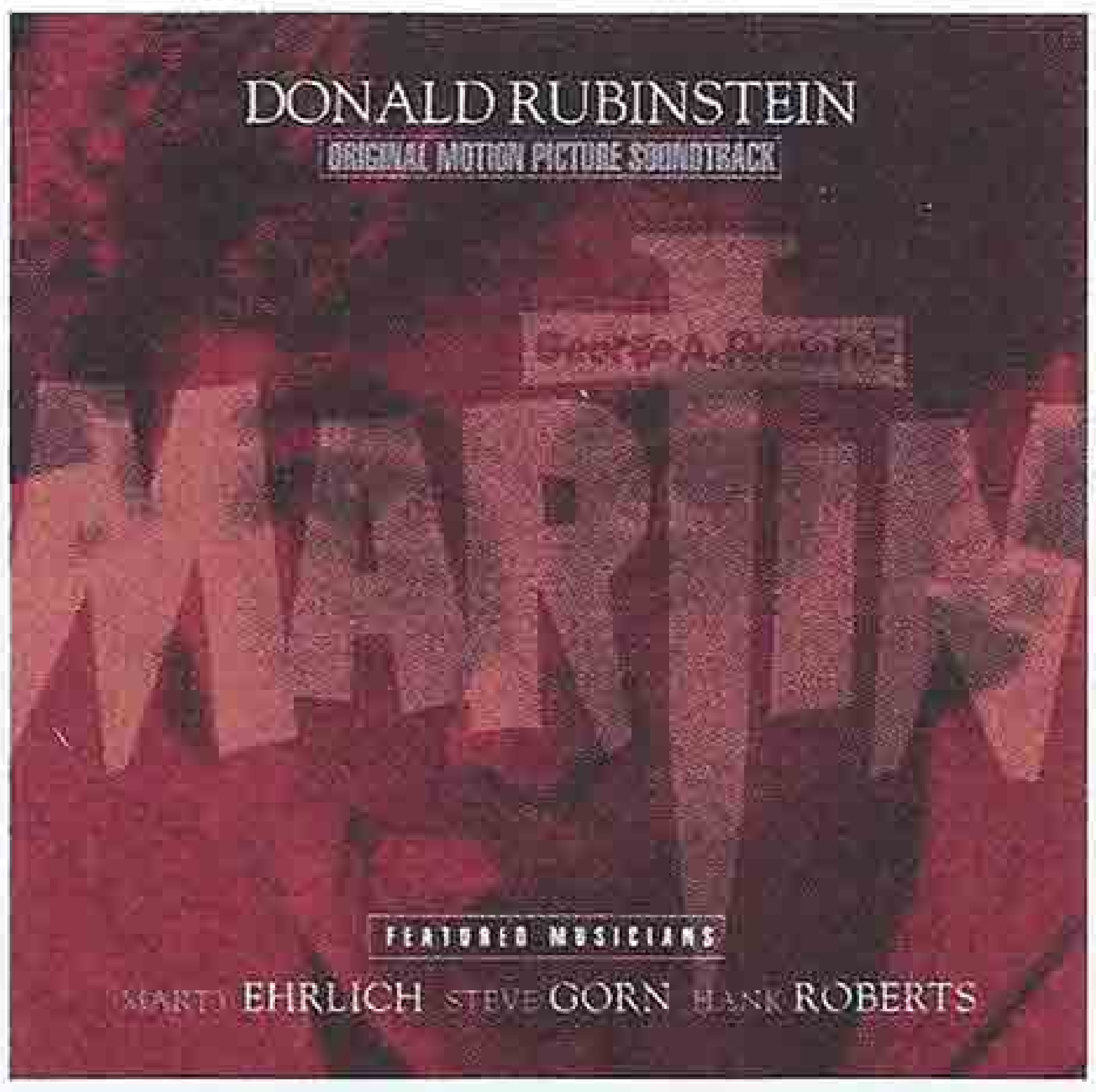
RUBINSTEIN: I love the human voice. It is an equalizer that speaks to our humanity and cuts through to the bone and heart. Oftentimes, instruments try to emulate the "singing" quality of the voice, so why not go to the source, to humanize as well as mark our aspiration? That said, all things are capable of speaking. You have to find their voice, give them voice and sit back and listen.

FANG: Without your scoring to help give them identifiable human souls, both *Martin* and *Bruiser* would be more difficult films to enjoy.

RUBINSTEIN: Thank you very much.

If it wasn't
for you I wouldn't have the AMAZING
career and great friends that I have TODAY
From **LOUIS KISS** *And* RUBBER MONSTERS.COM

THANK
YOU
GEORGE


DONALD RUBINSTEIN
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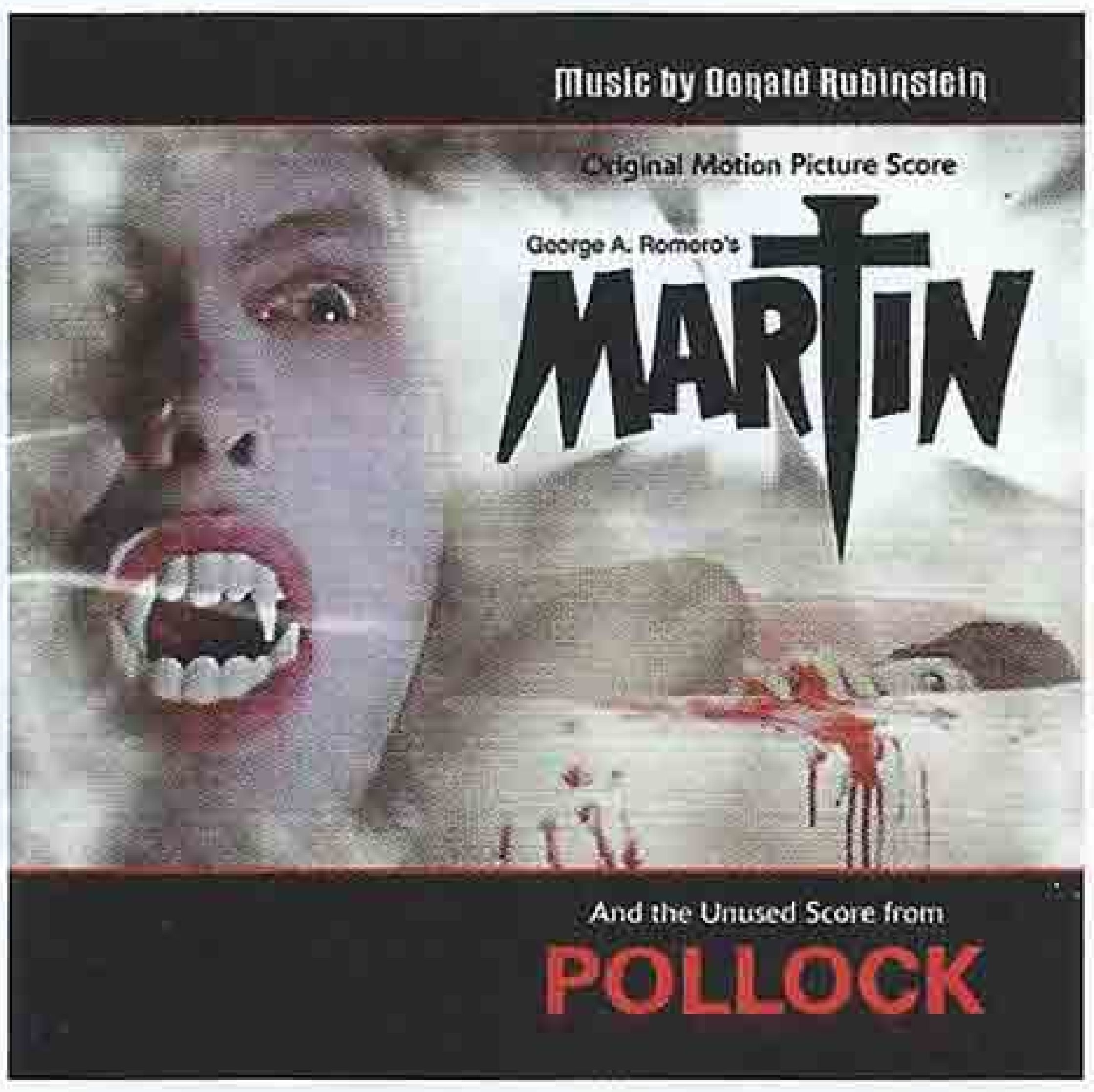
Music by Donald Rubinstein
Original Motion Picture Score
George A. Romero's
MARTIN
And the Unused Score from
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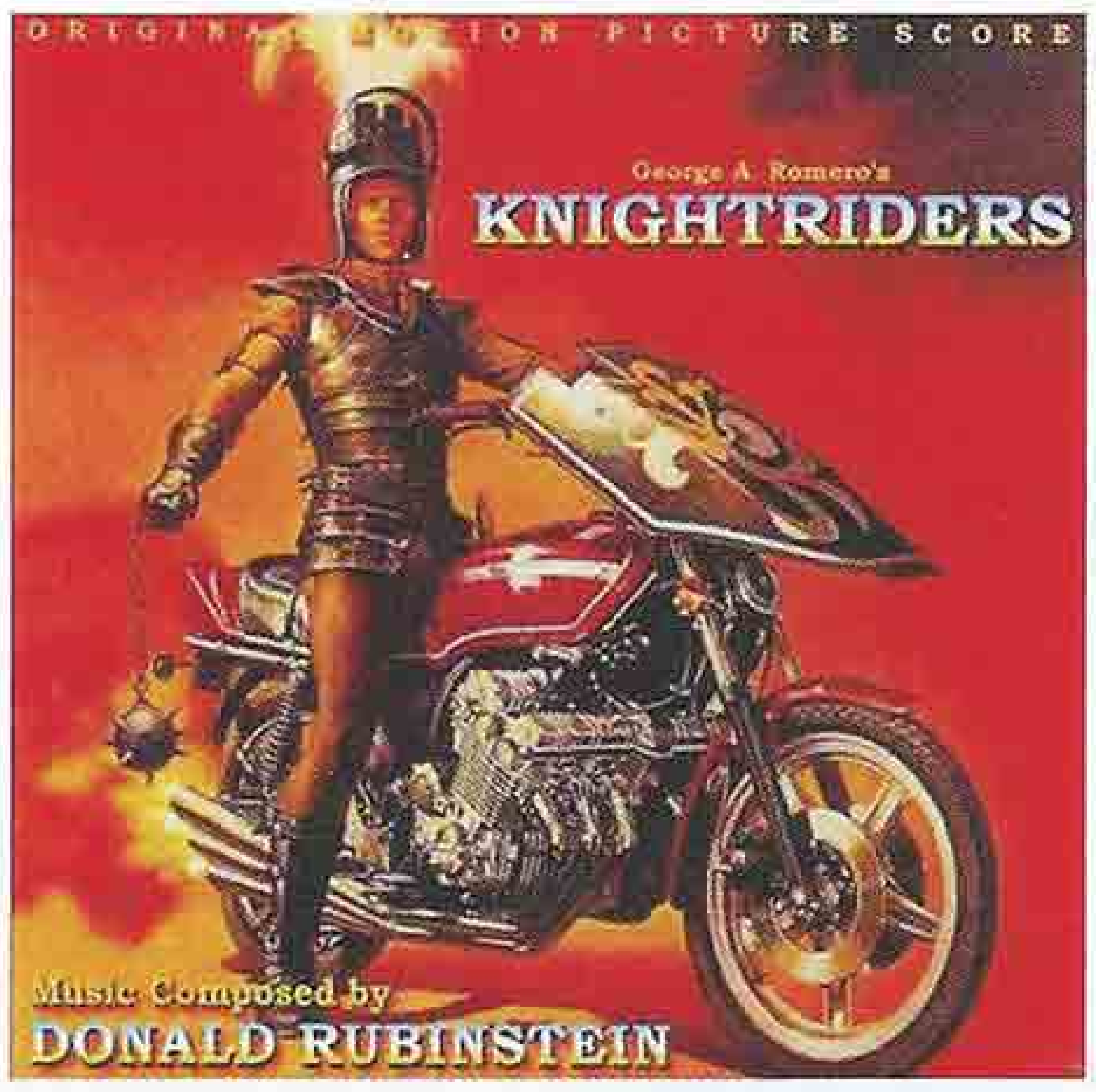
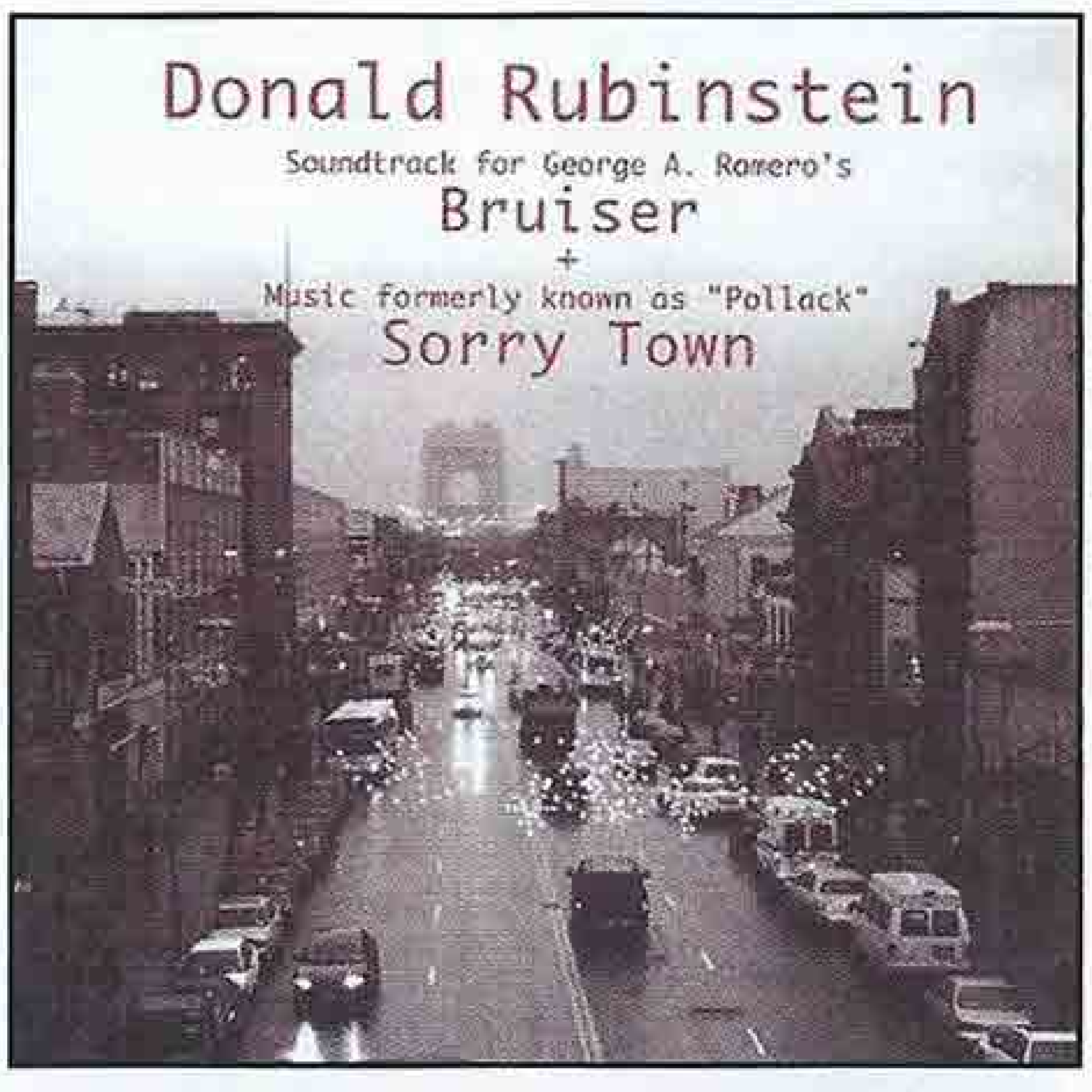

ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SCORE
George A. Romero's
KNIGHTRIDERS
Music Composed by
DONALD RUBINSTEIN


Donald Rubinstein
Soundtrack for George A. Romero's
Bruiser
+
Music formerly known as "Pollack"
Sorry Town

Rubinstein is currently completing his 24th CD of original music, and maintaining an active career in the visual arts. He looks forward to scoring more films. For more information, visit www.donaldrubinstein.com.

"I Didn't Want To Try And Build My Career On A Resume Alone..."

-- *Richard R. Nelson, co-producer of* ***Edgar Allan Poe's Requiem for the Damned***.

"I wanted a reel that could show the industry what I had to offer as a visual effects supervisor and editor. **The Factory** gave me the chance to build that reel.

I've been fortunate to be able to develop my digital effects skills – and my skills as an editor – on a number of productions while attending **The Factory**. Repeatedly, I've been asked to solve a variety of problems – from straight-up green screen compositing to wire removal to title design to set extensions – really more opportunities than I can list. I mean, I got to co-produce the feature film *Edgar Allan Poe's Requiem for the Damned*! Thanks to all of that I'm already getting paid work doing what I love. And I haven't even turned twenty-one…" – Richard R. Nelson

We are the film students at **The Factory Digital Filmmaking Program at Douglas**. By teaming up with Tom Savini's Special Make-Up Effects Program and the other creative art programs at our school - our dreams, our stories, and our visions can truly come to life in our work. If you want to be part of our team, if you have the heart and determination to put yourself out there and expose your passion… **we welcome you**.

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DAWN OF THE DEAD

The "Gone With the Wind" of horror films

If *Night of the Living Dead* laid out the rules for the unofficial zombie subgenre, *Dawn* cast them in iron. So massive was the international reach of *Dawn*, we can trace almost every appendage of ghouldom back to this towering two-hour-plus achievement—because while *Night* showed the world how to kill—or re-kill—the undead, *Dawn* graphically illustrated the fun that could be had if you were well-armed and free to assassinate as many ghouls as you wanted to take down, something that our heroes in this picture do with as much vigor and delight as revulsion.

Indeed, *Dawn of the Dead* is less a nightmare and more of a deluxe, phantasmagorical "Boy's Own" fantasy: It's the end of the world, and it's up to you, the survivor, to create a moral code of existence. And your castle keep to defend is a Shangri-La of material wealth, yours for the taking; all the food, clothes and luxury items you could ever want. But to get them, you have to evade and conquer an endless army of extremely hungry and violent humanoid monsters. Of course, that's not the only enemy our quartet of protagonists face in the film; in fact, when all the blood and viscera are cleared, once more it's human nature that proves to be humanity's downfall.

A visit to the mall was never the same after *Dawn of the Dead*.

Dawn of the Dead was released first overseas under the titles *Zombies* (in most English-speaking territories) and *Zombi* (in Italy and elsewhere), and this was of course due to the picture's chief monetary spark: fiery Italian wunderkind Dario Argento. Around the time Argento was making *Suspiria*, he contacted Romero, who was himself in the midst of *Martin*, and let it be known that he wanted the Pittsburgh-based icon to make a sequel to what he believed to be one of the greatest horror films of all time: *Night*. Romero was interested; this was something that had been in the planning and plotting stages lazily for years, as the many commercial dragons he chased post-*Night* hadn't commanded the same notoriety or business.

So off Romero went with new wife Christine Forrest to Rome, where they met with Argento and stayed for some great food, wild-eyed translated chat and creative plotting. The deal these two titans of terror struck dictated that Romero would deliver his final cut and the raw elements to Argento, who would then have the film for the European market as well as the liberty to release his own edition of the picture. The resulting versions are similar, and yet alien to each other.

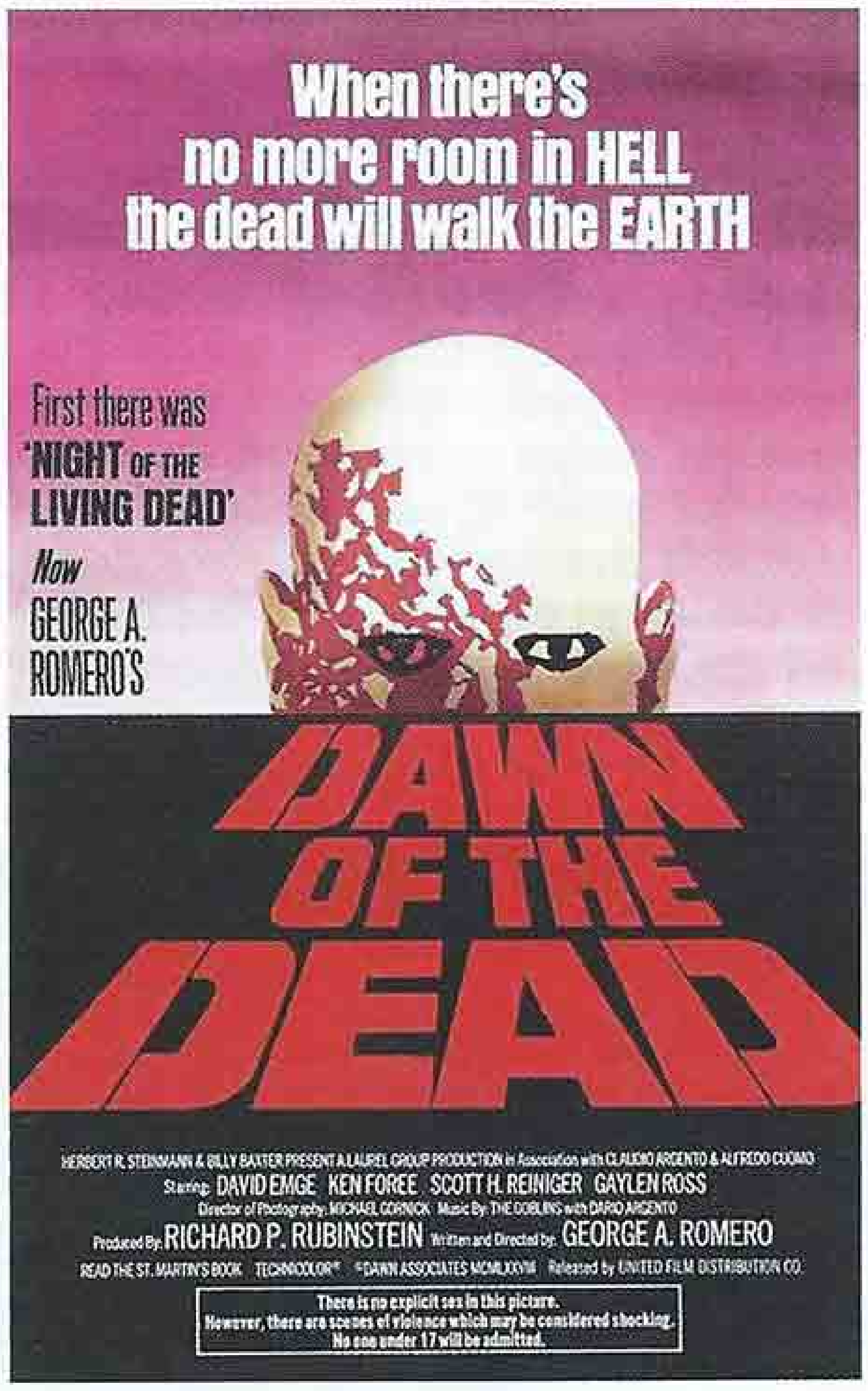
For one, the Italian cut forgoes the De Wolfe scratch-score library music that Romero drenches his version in, eerie needle-drop cues that drift in and out of sequences, adding depth, dissonance and even humor to the horror (see page 26). Instead, Argento tightened his edit, accentuating gore, inserting brief blasts of extra bloodshed, removing non-narrative-propelling dialogue and other elements that he considered "too American" and putting in gobs of prog-ish metal by his house supergroup Goblin. Romero in turn utilized parts of the Goblin score for the U.S. release in 1979.

But both cuts tell the same intimate yet epic tale. It's the end of the world—per-

Amidst all the undead action, it's the struggle of the living (including Gaylen Ross and David Emge) to hold onto their humanity that makes *Dawn* truly compelling.

Photos: Copyright United Film Distribution

Dawn was all about consumerism in any number of ways.


When there's no more room in HELL the dead will walk the EARTH
First there was 'NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD'
Now GEORGE A. ROMERO'S
DAWN OF THE DEAD
Starring DAVID EMGE KEN FOREE SCOTT H. REINIGER GAYLEN ROSS
Produced By RICHARD P. RUBINSTEIN Written and Directed by GEORGE A. ROMERO
There is no explicit sex in this picture. However, there are scenes of violence which may be considered shocking. No one under 17 will be admitted.

haps following *Night*, perhaps in another universe altogether. The living-dead virus has spiraled out of control, with zombies slowly usurping the confused, frightened and superstitious humans in ranks. After pretty newsroom producer Fran (Gaylen Ross) and two SWAT members, Peter and Roger (Ken Foree and Scott H. Reiniger) jump aboard the station chopper with Fran's lover Stephen (David Emge), they seek shelter from the insanity in the Monroeville Mall outside Pittsburgh. The survivors set up shop, decimate the hordes of ghouls within, block the doors with trucks and settle into utopia. But—as we all know—you can try to ignore the problem, but you don't have a ghost of a chance of it ignoring you…

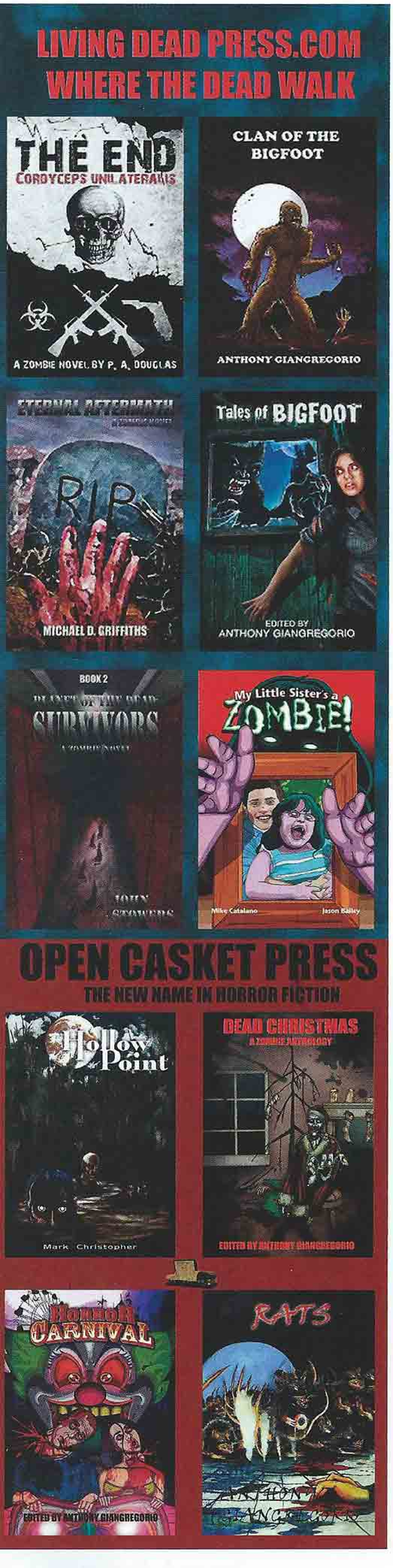
The performances in *Dawn* rarely get their due, but it really is these four actors who bravely sell the scenario. We believe them, are with them on their adventures, empathize and are frustrated by their troubles, root for them. In fact, the beauty of the picture is that no matter how many times you watch it, you always get swept up in its drama, hoping against all hope that Roger smartens up and Flyboy does not get on that elevator… Of course, they don't and do, and of course, we are devastated when we see them make the same mistakes again and again.

Romero's writing and directing are the best they've ever been here, as are Tom Savini's groundbreaking, go-for-broke gore/prosthetic gags; no matter how much the state of the art improves, his work in *Dawn* has simply never, ever been bettered. There's an energy to the illusions, that glorious "melted crayon" blood and the way it smears across the green-grey ghoul makeup and those butcher's spoils spilling out of foam latex torsos.

Dawn of the Dead is simply an immaculate entertainment.

—*Chris Alexander*

For the first time, Romero's zombies stalked in color, shedding blood that was brighter than life.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RATS
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DE WOLFE OF THE DEAD

Dawn of the Dead is George A. Romero's most beloved and perhaps charismatic effort, and its grab with fans is due to many factors working in collusion. Tom Savini's revolutionary splatter FX, its quartet of dynamic lead performances, the individual personalities of the ghouls themselves, the shiny mall location, the epic scope…it was the first zombie action-satire, and it still holds court today, judging all who dare quote it (including Romero's own subsequent ghoul films).

But the film's not-so-secret sauce isn't in the visual sting, but rather in the sound. Some of *Dawn*'s most potent and recognizable music, of course, comes from Italian rock band Goblin, but the most interesting element is the scratch score culled from the famous De Wolfe Music Library—wildly inappropriate and surreal stings, cues and themes that Romero mixed and placed like a half-mad DJ into the body of the final cut.

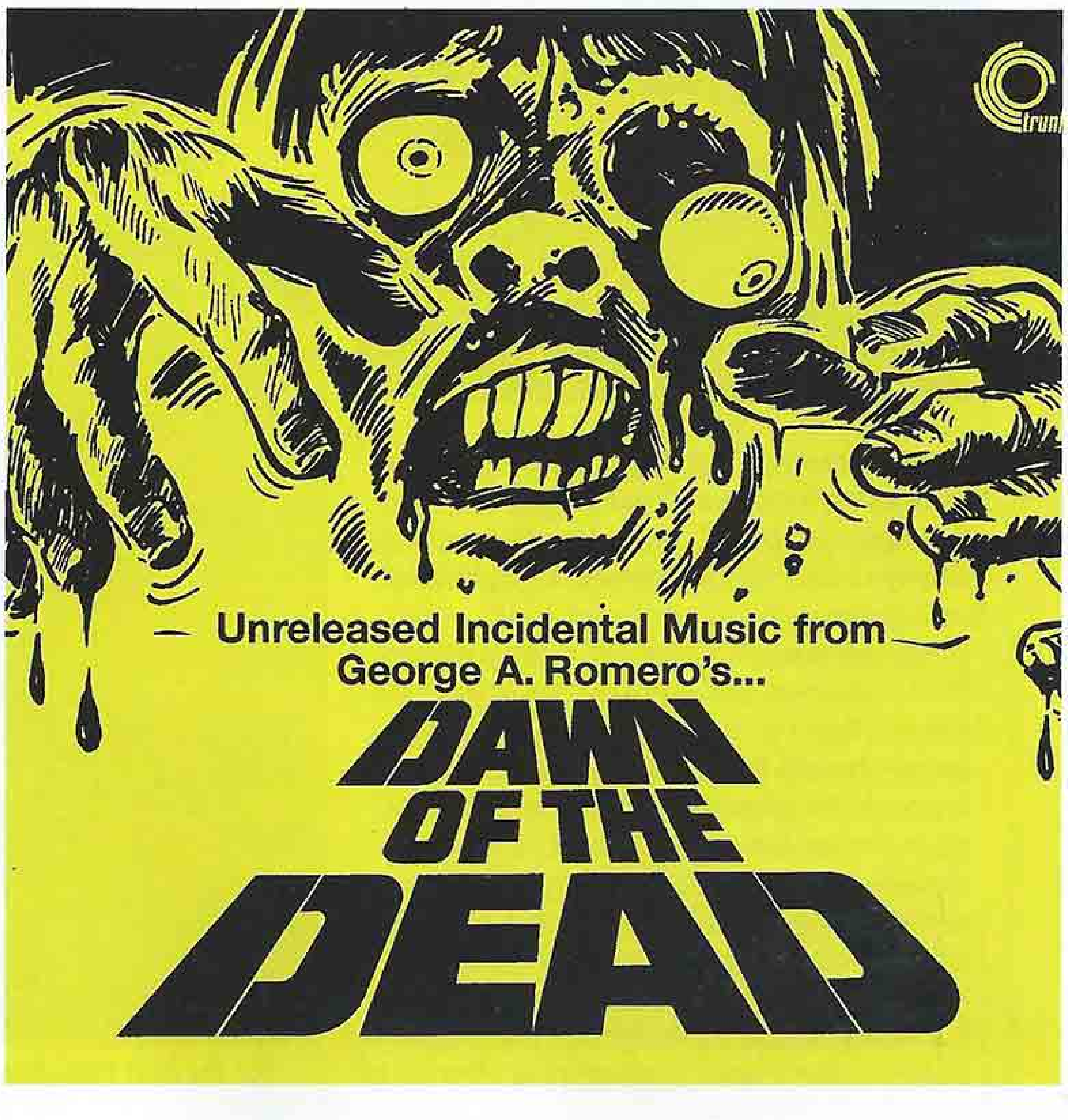
The De Wolfe Library is almost legendary in Hollywood. Founded by Dutchman expat Meyer De Wolfe at the turn of the century in England, the company turned to movies after Warner Bros. released the landmark "talkie" *The Jazz Singer* in 1927 and suddenly, recorded sound and music became an ever-swelling staple in cinema. De Wolfe created libraries of diverse music that studios could acquire to provide aural propulsion to select pictures and newsreels, eventually releasing a series of albums in the late 1950s and early '60s (which are now impossible to find, and highly collectible). Cult entertainment often licensed music from the library, like UK funnymen Monty Python's outrageous *Flying Circus* and the immortal sci-fi staple *Doctor Who*, and later, weird 1970s pictures like the Hong Kong cult favorite *Mighty Peking Man*.

But horror fans forever owe the company a debt for their eerie sounds that Romero cribbed for *Dawn of the Dead*. From the ghostly sonics that open the picture on that devious red shag wall, to the melancholy vibraphone tinklings that accompany scenes of mall ennui, to the film's most famous cue, the weirdo polka tune "The Gonk" that honks over scenes of confused zombies being whisked to the second floor of the mall by an escalator—the De Wolfe music gives Romero's film humor, pathos, absurdity, horror and…life.

Still run today by De Wolfe's grandchildren, the company has long since branched out as Angel Studios in Islington, a place where acts as diverse as The Cure and Adele have recorded their strongest work. And the De Wolfe Library material is still highly in demand from DJs and hip-hop acts around the world, not to mention filmmakers seeking adventurous, classic sounds to goose their imagery (*Grindhouse*, for example, employs the odd De Wolfe sting). In the early part of this decade, upstart label Trunk Records scoured the library and culled all the *Dawn* tracks for a special soundtrack release on vinyl and CD. You can find that and other great film music at www.trunkrecords.greedbag.com.

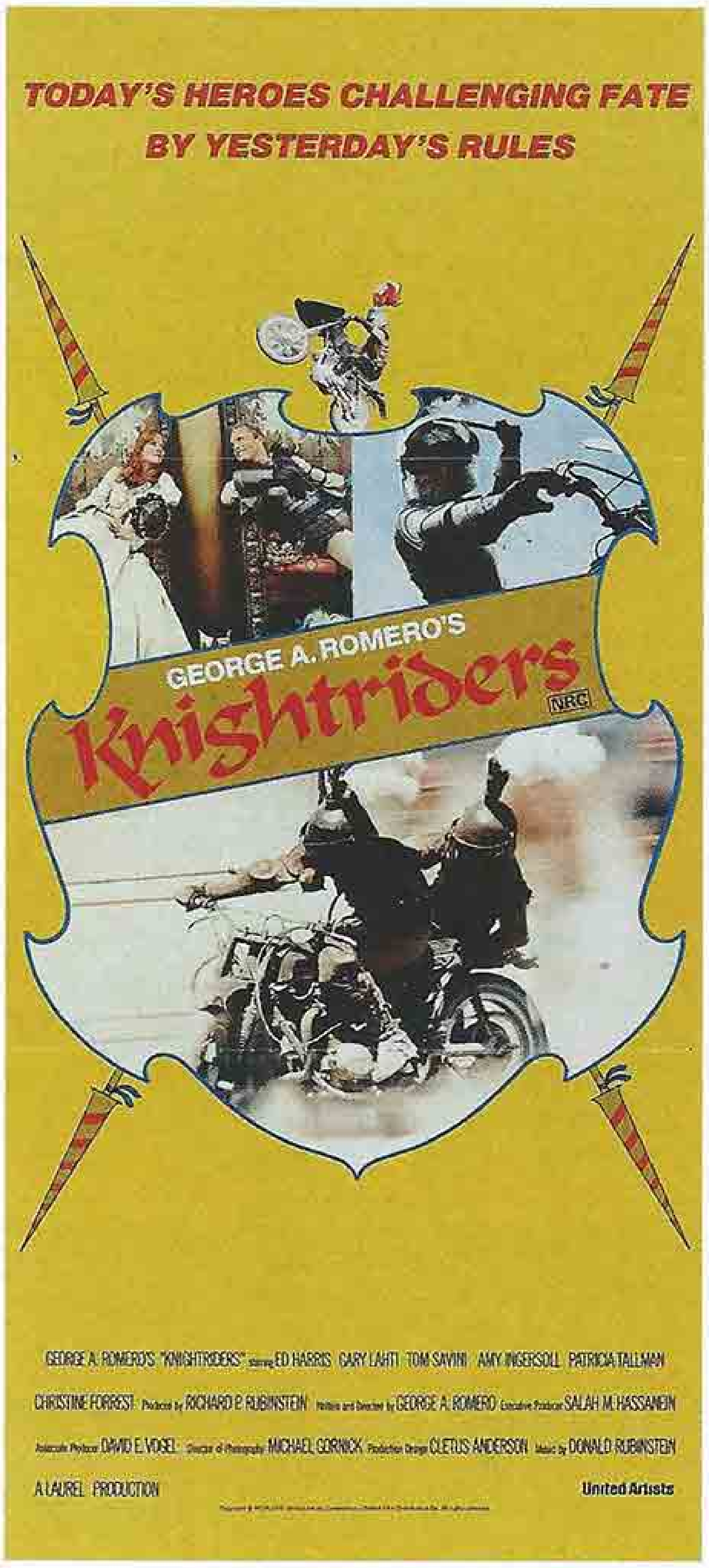
Romero himself told FANGORIA that while he misses his days experimenting with library music (all of his early films, from *Night of the Living Dead* to *Creepshow*, contain "needle drop" cues), he mourns that today it is far too costly to license such tracks, opting instead for the more reasonable original-score approach. But nothing really beats those cues, and one viewing of Dario Argento's De Wolfe-free edit of *Dawn* (titled *Zombi*) will attest to that. It just ain't *Dawn* without De Wolfe…

—Chris Alexander


trunk
Unreleased Incidental Music from
George A. Romero's...
DAWN OF THE DEAD

Knightriders

JOUST DO IT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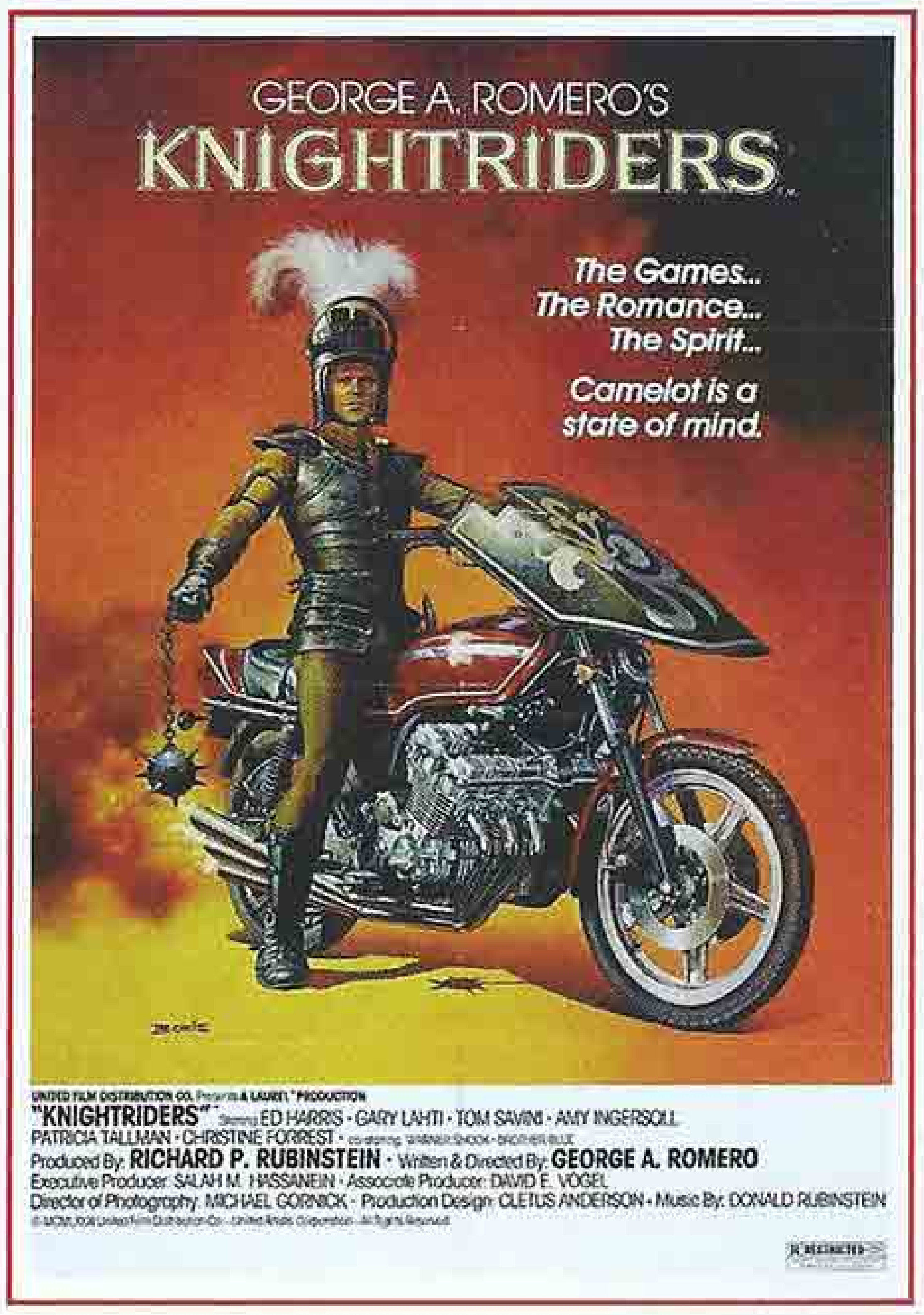
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Executive Producer: SALAH M. HASSANEIN · Associate Producer: DAVID E. VOGEL
Director of Photography: MICHAEL GORNICK · Production Design: CLETUS ANDERSON · Music By: DONALD RUBINSTEIN
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Confounding to casual fans, *Knightriders* is George A. Romero's most personal, and most adventurous, film. While some might wince at the poster, featuring a medieval-armor-clad Ed Harris astride a motorcycle with mace in hand, anyone open-minded and looking for a little insight into Romero's heart need look no further than this unique interpretation of the story of King Arthur and his Round Table.

Ed Harris plays Billy, the Arthurian head of a traveling Renaissance faire that showcases dramatic jousting tournaments, favoring dirt bikes over the equines of yore. The exhibitions are violent, fast-paced affairs, with combatants wielding axes, maces and swords. While entertaining audiences is the core intent, those who journey with the troupe have fully adopted life *à la* the 5th century and take their craft seriously. "Fight or yield" is their motto.

Billy, or "King William," is protective of his show and his band of performers, insisting on living life with a strict code of independence, honor and loyalty that is challenged when national media attention finds him. While dealing with an injury he sustained in battle, Billy is approached by a promoter named Bontempi (Martin Ferrero), who has his sights set on taking the group down a more commercial road. As tension mounts and the traveling family rolls into the outskirts of a new town, a local lawman in search of a payday appears, threatening trouble if he doesn't see some payola. Billy refuses on moral grounds, and he and one of his performers, Bagman (Don Berry), are jailed, Bagman beaten senseless.

Once freed, Billy returns to camp to find that some members, led by key performer Morgan (Tom Savini), want to go with the promoter into a new venture. As Billy loses his grip on the troupe, Morgan leads a group of riders away from Billy to Bontempi and more financially fruitful fields. It all leads up to the ultimate tournament between Billy's ragtag group of loyalists and Morgan's big-budget Bontempi crew, closing with a shock ending that is most definitely not predictable.

The cast is colorful, and the medieval references are many. *Dawn of the Dead* alum Ken Foree plays Little John, real-life spiritualist/street poet Brother Blue is Mer-

Serious genre fans prefer these *Knightriders* over that silly talking-car show.

Photos: Copyright United Film Distribution

Initially part of the same troupe, Ed Harris and Tom Savini ultimately find themselves on opposing sides.

lin and so on. Romero cites the Society for Creative Anachronism, a living history group focusing on pre-17th-century European cultures, as his inspiration for the film, and he wasn't the only one turning an eye to the days of swords and sorcery in 1981. Director John Boorman's *Excalibur,* a big-budget take on Arthur, Lancelot and Merlin, opened the same weekend as *Knightriders;* to the surprise of many, *Newsweek* gave Romero's picture the more favorable review.

Where Boorman adapted Thomas Malory's 1485 Knights of the Round Table anthology *Le Morte d'Arthur* (*The Death of Arthur*) into a story of birth, life, death and rebirth, *Knightriders* has been widely interpreted as an allegory about the struggle of the artist to remain pure to his art against practical pressures and outside influence. On a deeper level, it is the story of Romero himself, the Pittsburgh-rooted indie auteur whose most iconic film, *Night of the Living Dead*, was as financially irrelevant, due to the copyright snafu that put the picture in the public domain immediately upon release, as it was creatively fulfilling.

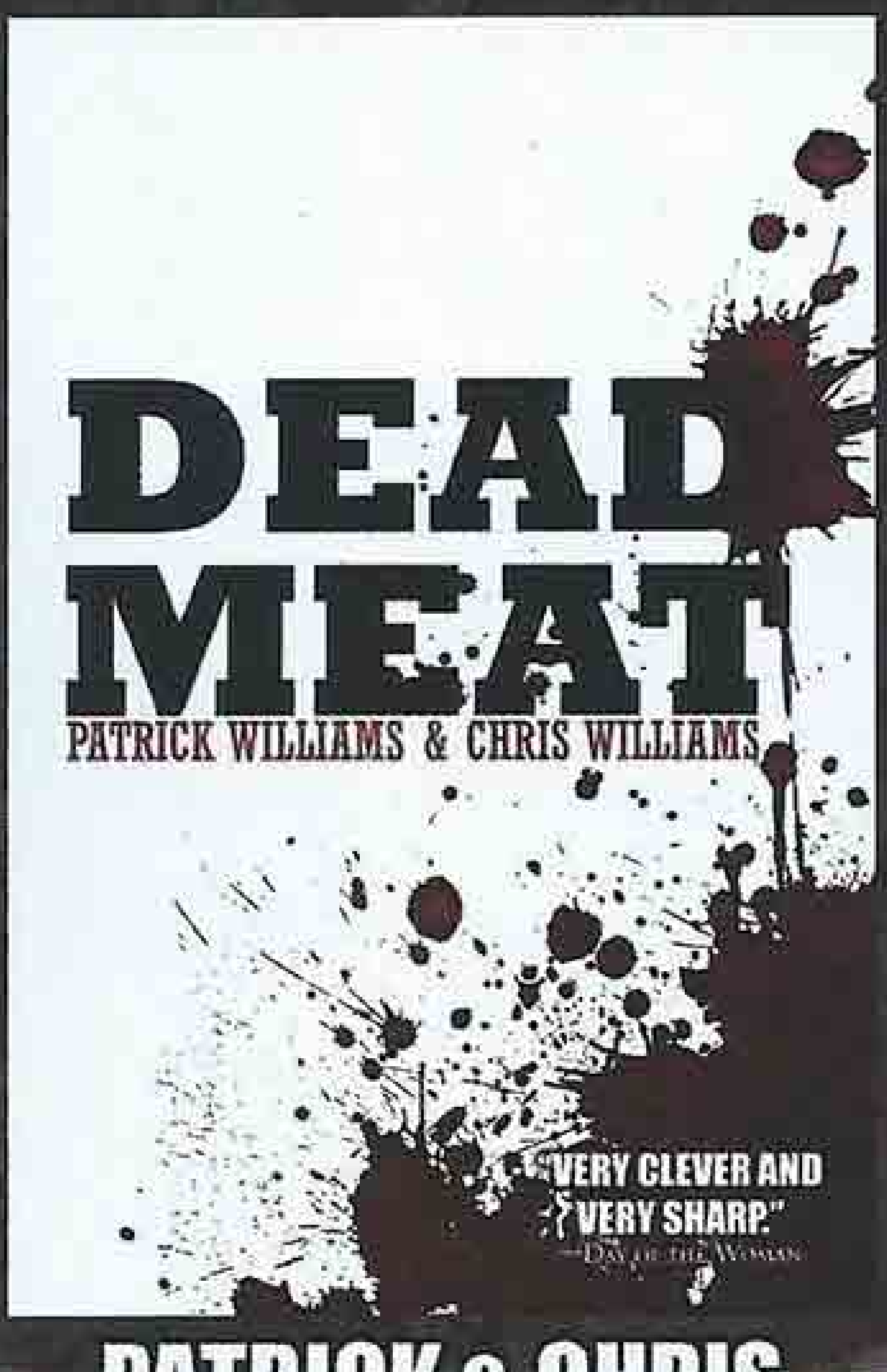
But money wasn't the point in the first place. Like Harris' Billy, Romero is in it for the art, and he creates it with a tight family of contributors he continues to reassemble, project after project. His determination to do things on his own terms has relegated Romero to the cinema fringe, despite his obvious influence. Also like Billy, Romero is thrilled by the audience, yet hardly interested in the bothersome mechanics of promotion to attract more of them. As Romero explained to Fango in March 1981, "There is a lot of me in the [*Knightriders*] script. I'd be lying if I said I didn't identify with the characters, and with the character of the King [Billy]. Trying to maintain some kind of ethic and individuality, despite the world at large, is really what the film is about." And it is what Romero, in his 44 years in cinema, has always been about.

The intimacy of *Knightriders* is matched by the skill and love poured into its creation. When boiled to basics, this is an epic (145-minute) adventure tale featuring a group of creative individuals who blend artistry with brutality, passion with entertainment and history with the contemporary. Just like Romero and his own gang of collaborators, toiling away decade after decade to entertain audiences with a mad brand of carny exhibitionism free of reliance on big money and studio backing, *Knightriders* speaks to everyone who creates art with truth, dignity and a complete lack of celebrity consideration.

—Justin Beahm

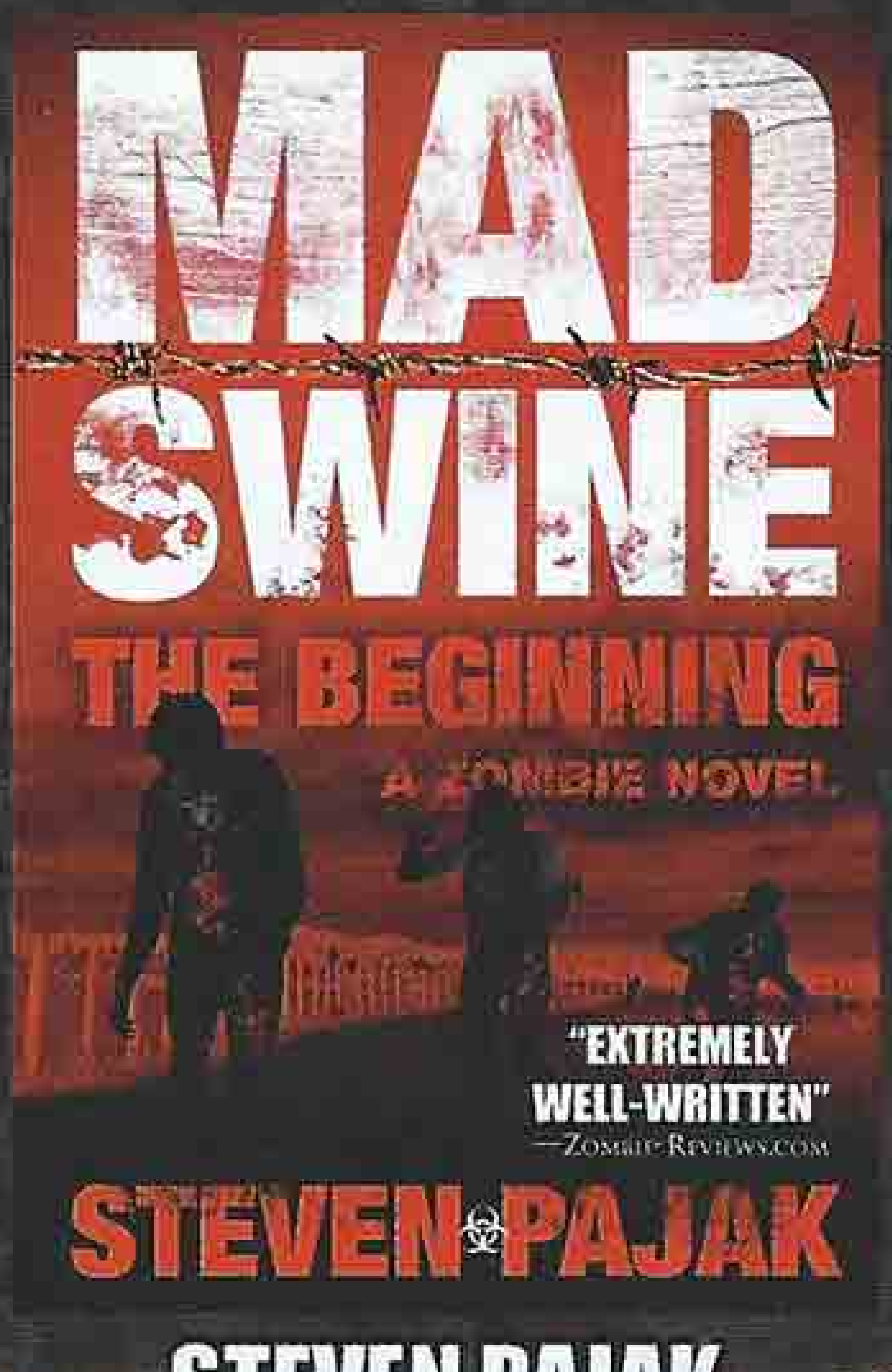
DESTRUCTIVE FICTION FROM PERMUTED PRESS

DEAD MEAT


DEAD MEAT
PATRICK WILLIAMS & CHRIS WILLIAMS
"VERY CLEVER AND VERY SHARP."
—Day of the Woman

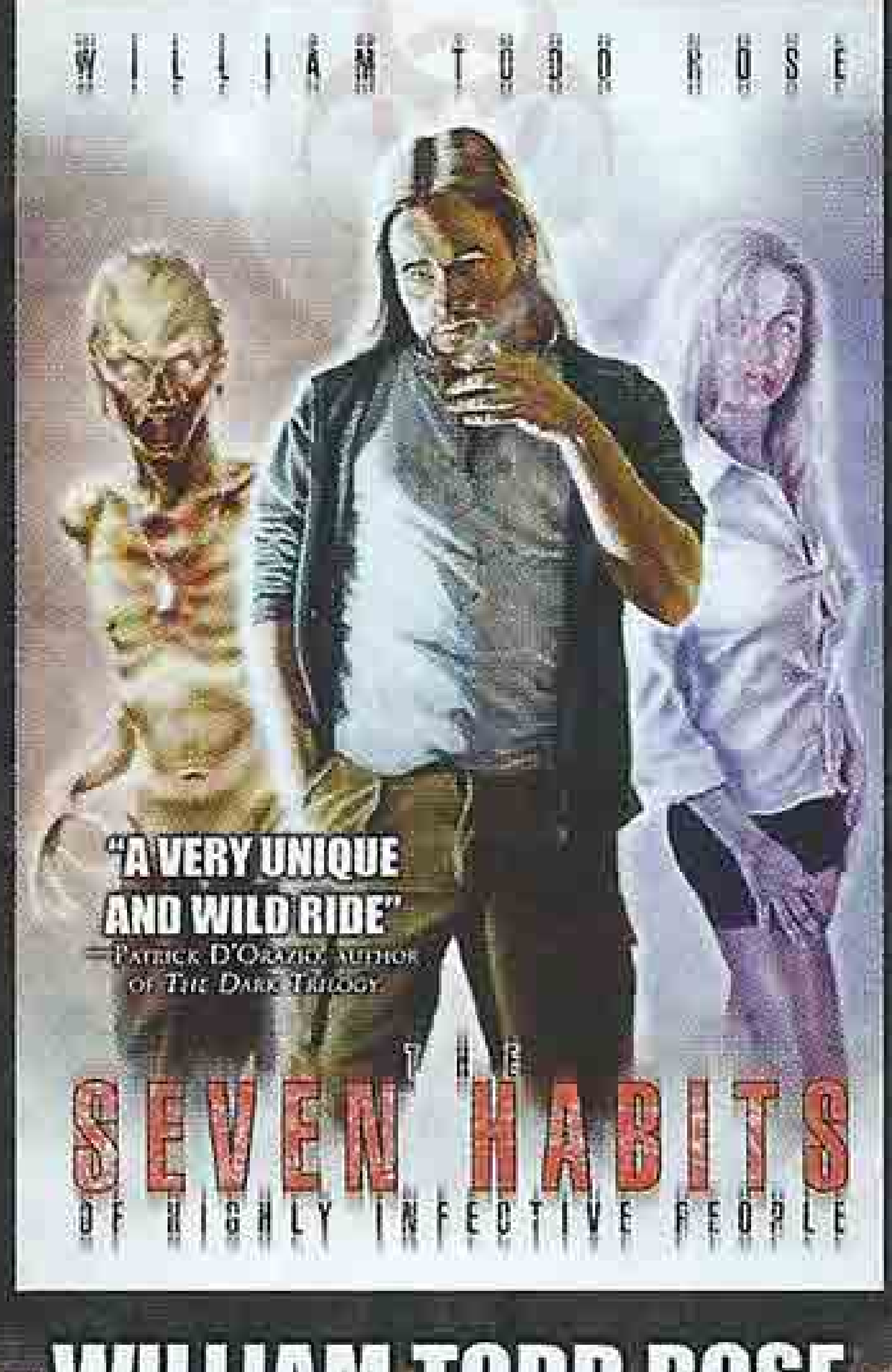
PATRICK & CHRIS WILLIAMS

MAD SWINE: THE BEGINNING



STEVEN PAJAK

SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY INFECTIVE PEOPLE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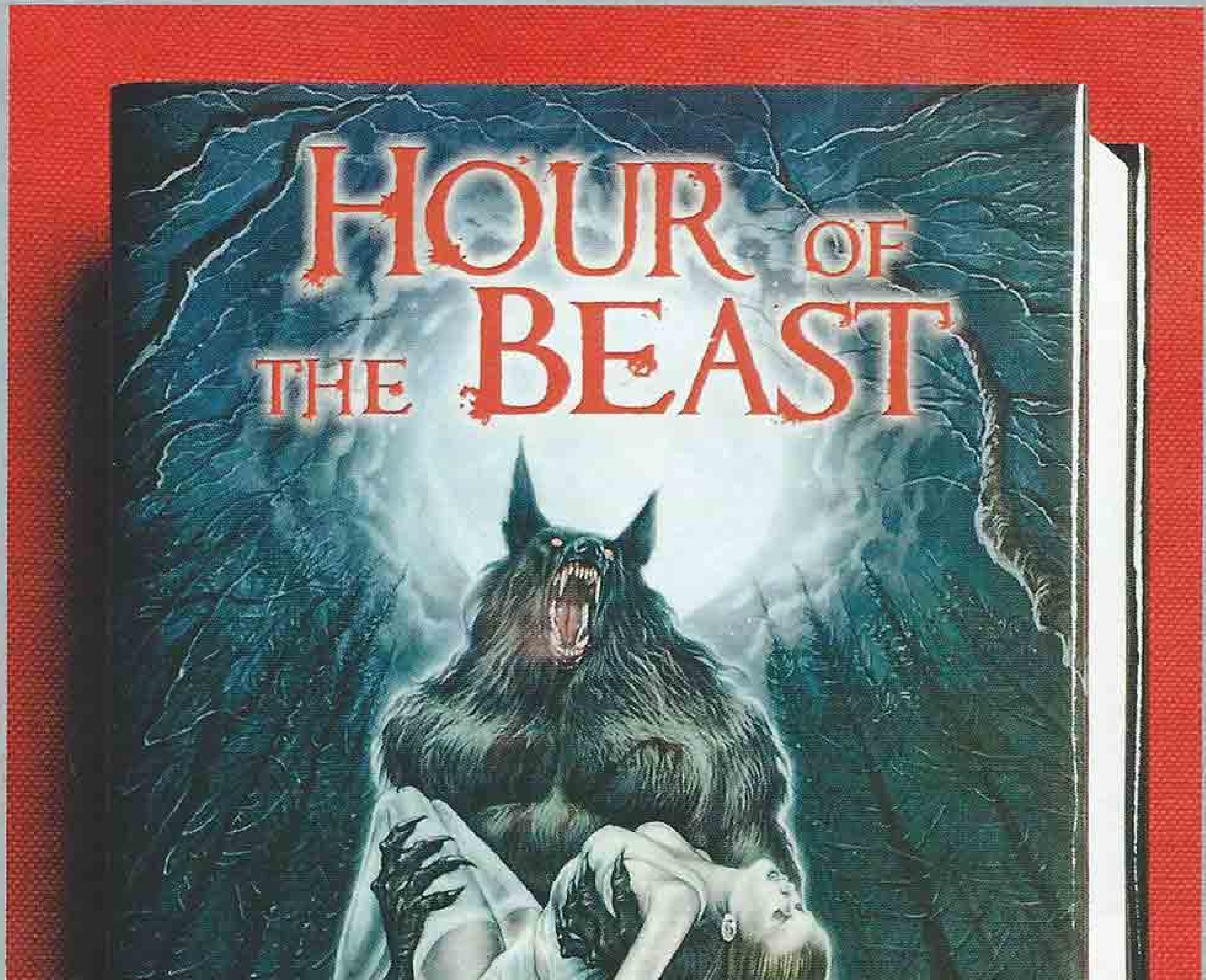

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Tom Savini
RENAISSANCE MAN

As an actor for Romero, the FX wiz was a modern-day knight on a motorcycle.

By MICHAEL FELSHER

With the help of some damsels in undress, Morgan (Tom Savini) sells out.

After George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* was unleashed to audiences worldwide in 1978 and Stateside in 1979, the director quickly found himself in a rarefied and highly desired position. The film's success had been rewarded with a three-picture deal by *Dawn*'s independent distributor, United Film Distribution. While there was, understandably, a desire by many to see him immediately spin another tale of the undead, Romero opted instead to head off in a completely different direction. He created a tale of modern-day Arthurian knights and a makeshift family of Renaissance men and women who travel from town to town living by their own rules and desires.

Meanwhile, the career of *Dawn*'s makeup FX maestro Tom Savini was in full bloom. 1980 saw the release of *Friday the 13th*, which became one of the most popular horror films of all time, thanks in no small part to Savini's now-seminal work. However, the blood and gore he so memorably created for those movies would not be needed for *Knightriders*—but that didn't mean Romero had no place for him. Fango spoke to Savini to look back on how *Knightriders* came to be, and how he stepped from behind the scenes to become one of the film's leading men.

FANGORIA: You had already been Romero's right-hand man on *Martin* and *Dawn*, providing the FX as well as making onscreen appearances. Were you considered for an acting role in *Knightriders* from the start?

TOM SAVINI: I had to audition, actually. George was going all over the place auditioning soap-opera stars and lots of actors in New York and LA, I was actually the first person he cast in *Knightriders*, after the Pittsburgh audition. He cast me as Morgan right then and there.

FANG: What did you think of the project when you first heard about it? It was quite a departure for Romero at that time, and remains a singular effort in his canon.

SAVINI: Well, somewhere along the line of doing effects for George, I remember seeing a treatment called *Knights*. And I thought, "This is right up my alley, are you kidding? Swords, fencing, riding motorcycles…" Then, as it got closer, the title had to be changed to *Knightriders* because John Boorman had *Knights* as the title for *Excalibur* back then.

FANG: The character of Morgan is, as you say, right up your alley. He's very charismatic, a ladies' man…

SAVINI: So are you saying that I'm charismatic and a ladies' man and a bon vivant? Is that what you're saying [*laughs*]?

FANG: [*Laughs*] Yeah…is that bad? I don't think it's a bad thing.

SAVINI: I think exactly what you're saying is kind of how George saw Morgan. And I knew who Morgan le Fay was because I had just done King Arthur in *Camelot* on stage, and Morgan was a woman! I was completely up for it, because I had done seven years of repertory theater before that; playing a lead didn't bother me, and acting for George certainly didn't bother me. It was something I had done before, and something I was looking forward to.

FANG: Where did the film shoot, and what was the atmosphere on the set?

SAVINI: It was shot at a place called the Outdoor Life Lodge, just slightly north of Pittsburgh. It was a summer riding motorcycles, wearing armor, fencing, groupies, the swimming pool at the hotel with all the stunt guys doing diving shows off the diving board and teaching us. We would roller-skate around the hotel with pillows strapped to our butts in case we would fall. The fourth floor belonged to us!

FANG: In the middle of all this insanity, your co-star in the film, Ed Harris, gives a very intense and almost tortured performance, one that stands in stark contrast to

Savini (with frequent FX assistant Taso Stavrakis) brought his biker experience from *Dawn of the Dead* to *Knightriders*.

Photos: Copyright United Film Distribution

Morgan's more carefree and outgoing nature. What was Harris like to work with?

SAVINI: He was very serious about the role. We would sit around in somebody's hotel room and talk about the action and what was going on and getting into character. Ed did tune in to the honor of the thing. And I don't believe he thinks of it as a performance, but in terms of how it affected *him*. You know, it's like a relationship; sometimes you enjoy being with somebody not because of how you feel about them, but how they make you feel about yourself.

FANG: Considering the atmosphere on set, and the colorful personalities of the cast, how did Romero manage to corral a film out of all this madness?

SAVINI: Well, it's a good question. I can't remember seeing George involved in any of the hotel antics. We would go to the set and just do whatever George told us to do. He does his storyboards in his mind—we never saw a physical storyboard. I've never seen George ever raise his voice or lose his temper, and the poor guy… I think three-quarters of the time, it was raining. But we would just go there and do it. He wore his lucky scarf, and we would do whatever he said. And I loved it when the stunt guys would do their pass, and George would ask me to do the same thing 'cause I was more violent! I did a few of my own stunts in the film, which I loved that he let me do.

The ladies just love a man who knows how to use his sword.

"The stunt guys would do their pass, and George would ask me to do the same thing 'cause I was more violent!"

FANG: Of course, it wasn't all fun and games. *Knightriders* called upon you to reveal some surprisingly honest and raw emotions on screen, most notably in the coronation scene near the end of the film. What were the challenges for you in those moments?

SAVINI: I didn't even remember that scene being in the script! All of a sudden, George put that together, and I was crying my ass off; everybody was. You looked around and [producer] Richard Rubinstein was crying, George was crying—everybody was crying for some reason. When Ed gave up the crown, I was crying too, and when the cameras turned around to me, I had already cried my eyes out and I had to pretend. It was powerfully emotional for all of us.

FANG: Despite not being a success at the time of its release in 1981, *Knightriders* has endured over the years.

SAVINI: Especially with Renaissance fairs! It's like *Lord of the Rings* to these people, even though we were jousting on motorcycles and not horses.

FANG: I hadn't really thought about that aspect of it, but it's true that you see the same type of traveling "families" at those fairs that are the focus of the film. In fact, it's not hard to see *Knightriders* as a metaphor for the fledgling filmmaking community that existed in Pittsburgh at that time. Only a few short years later, many of George's longtime collaborators would move on to Los Angeles or New York.

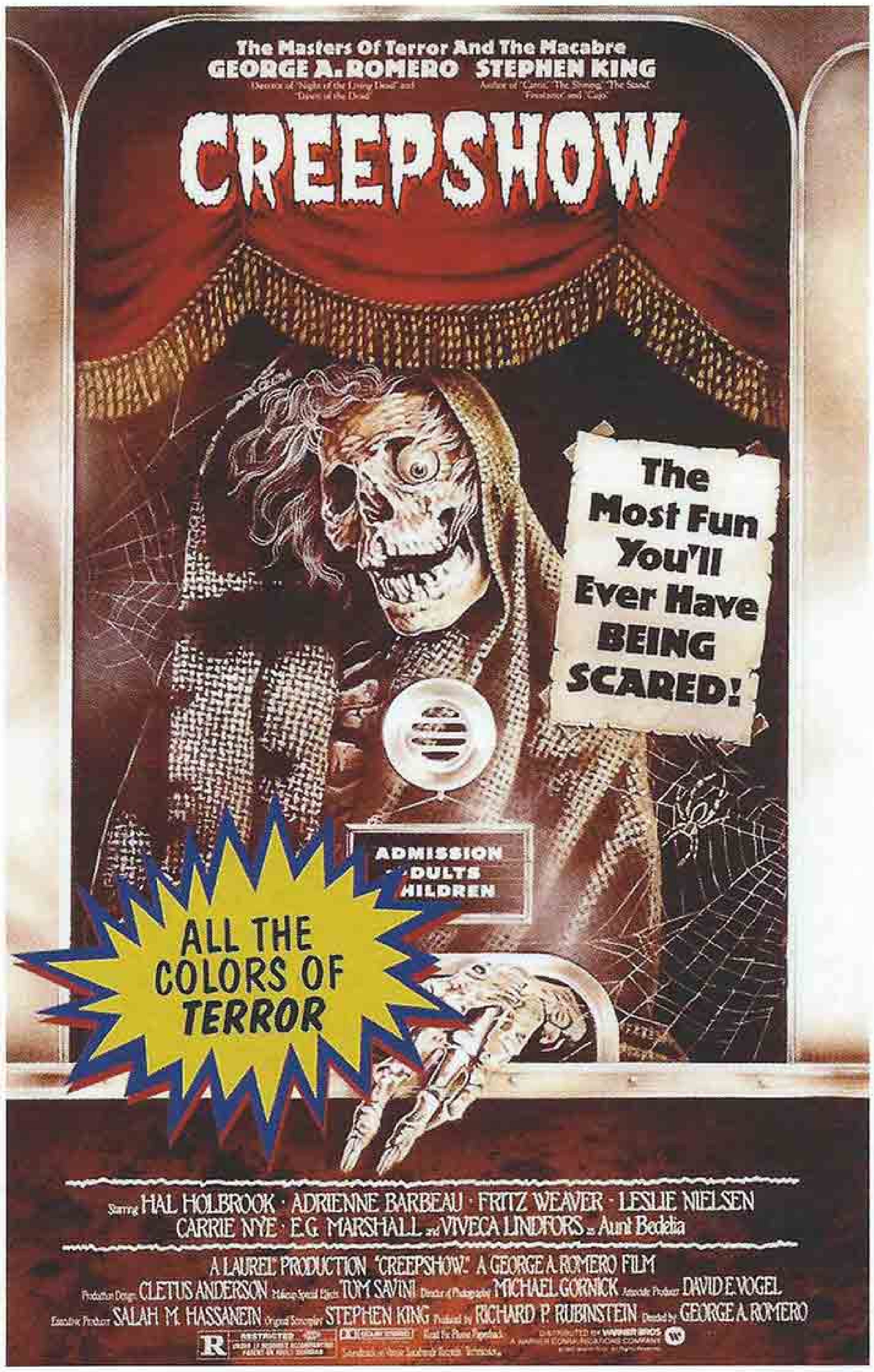
SAVINI: Yeah, absolutely. There is that sadness when I watch it because, for one thing, I'm re-experiencing the feelings I had then, but it's like anything that was great in your life. You look back, and it doesn't exist except in your mind, in your memory, in your feelings, and it was a powerful slice of life that will always be with you.

FANG: At the end of the film, we see the newly re-formed troupe traveling off toward their next adventure, now with Morgan as their king. My last question to you is: Where do you see Morgan and the knights now? What has happened to them in the ensuing 30 years since we saw them ride off down the road?

SAVINI: Morgan is very much alive in my own life and spirit, because you may think I look like someone who would kill your mother, but that honor and respect is something that's very much alive in me. You expect it from your friends, you simply live that way. And I still fence! I'm looking at all the swords on my walls, and there's a picture from *Knightriders* right there. It's me and Ed Harris on the bikes, wearing the crown. It's very much a part of me in many ways.

Two worlds collided—literally—in Romero's most idiosyncratic flick.

Knightriders' jousters trade horses for hogs.


The Masters Of Terror And The Macabre
GEORGE A. ROMERO
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Production Design CLETUS ANDERSON Makeup Special Effects TOM SAVINI Director of Photography MICHAEL GORNICK Associate Producer DAVID E. VOGEL
Executive Producer SALAH M. HASSANEIN Original Screenplay STEPHEN KING Produced by RICHARD P. RUBINSTEIN Directed by GEORGE A. ROMERO
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I saw *Creepshow* very soon after its release on Canadian pay TV, and it promptly blew my mind. And unbeknownst to my 7-year-old self, it was my first George A. Romero movie. Looking back on Romero's extensive genre filmography, it may be my favorite outside of *Dawn of the Dead*. There are myriad reasons, but the key factor has to be the picture's literary spirit/ source, the pen and psyche of Stephen King.

Creepshow is King-penned omnibus of five broadly etched and ghoulish short stories, wedged charmingly into a retro, EC Comics-inspired visual and thematic template and strung together by an even broader connecting tale. As in all horror anthologies, some segments hit harder than others—though that's really a subjective statement. The beauty of *Creepshow* is that each chapter is its own film, and because of this, every serious fan has their own favorite. For me, even the lesser stories are titanic in comparison to any other horror picture released that year (1982), and each is drenched in a fascinating, four-color-saturated and paneled style that has been copied to death (including by its sequels—1987's mediocre *Creepshow 2*, penned and produced by Romero from King sources and directed by Michael Gornick, and 2006's unwatchable Romero/King-free *Creepshow III*) but never bettered or more affectionately designed. That's what really makes *Creepshow* such a time-defying masterpiece of ghoulish Grand Guignol: There is genuine affection here, for the source material, for comic books, for monsters in the closet, for childhood and, in the case of Romero, King, FX wiz Tom Savini and the embarrassingly rich cast, each other.

As we smash in from black—or the Warner Bros. logo, as this was Romero's first major-studio release—we are introduced to a little boy (King's son Joe, himself now an established and respected author under the name Joe Hill) who is getting the fourth degree from his furious dad (Tom Atkins). Seems the lad has been leaning a bit to far into the land of monsters, mayhem and "people turning into weeds, ferchrissake!" and the old man has had enough. In a fit of rage, he slaps his boy and confiscates his comic book, called—of course—*Creepshow*. Later, alone in his room, the kid is visited by a skeletal, moldering yet very rock-'n'-roll ghoul at his window, and as the child smiles at his monstrous guest, the entire universe is rotoscoped into the style of the comic, whose title bleeds up onto the screen. After an animated credits sequence, we begin our journey into the bowels of the book…

The first installment is the cold, Gothic morality play "Father's Day," in which a gaggle of preening, hateful relatives (among them Carrie Nye and a young Ed Harris) gather at their looming family mansion to commemorate the passing of their patriarch, the miserable Nathan Grantham. Seems old Nate regularly abused and controlled his pitiful daughter Bedelia (the late, great Viveca Lindfors), even apparently murdering her fiancé, and one fateful Father's Day, while preparing the bastard's cake, she smashed in his head with a marble ashtray. But as the drunk Bedelia chastises her long-deceased dad at his grave, he comes a-crawling out of the steaming ground, choking his shocked spawn. As he wanders toward his former home, one request rumbles out of his long-rotted lips: "It's Father's Day…and I…want…my…cake…"

"Father's Day" is campy, of course, but its characters aren't in on the joke, so the horror is real and often–especially for younger audiences—soul-searingly scary. Savini's FX are, as usual, groundbreaking (John Amplas, inside the Nathan-corpse costume, gives the ghoul a great physical presence), Gornick's go-for-broke cinematography is firmly stationed in the surreal and John Harrison's pounding synth music and grand piano bashings sell it all.

The next tale, "The Lonesome Death of Jordy Verrill," is, to this writer and many others, the weakest link as far as horror goes, but for sheer King camp and weirdness, it can't be beat. The writer himself plays the titular hick, an impoverished good ol' boy living in the sticks who touches some "meteor shit" and begins to grow grass all over his body while everything he touches also turns into a garden. It's a blast watching King bug his eyes,

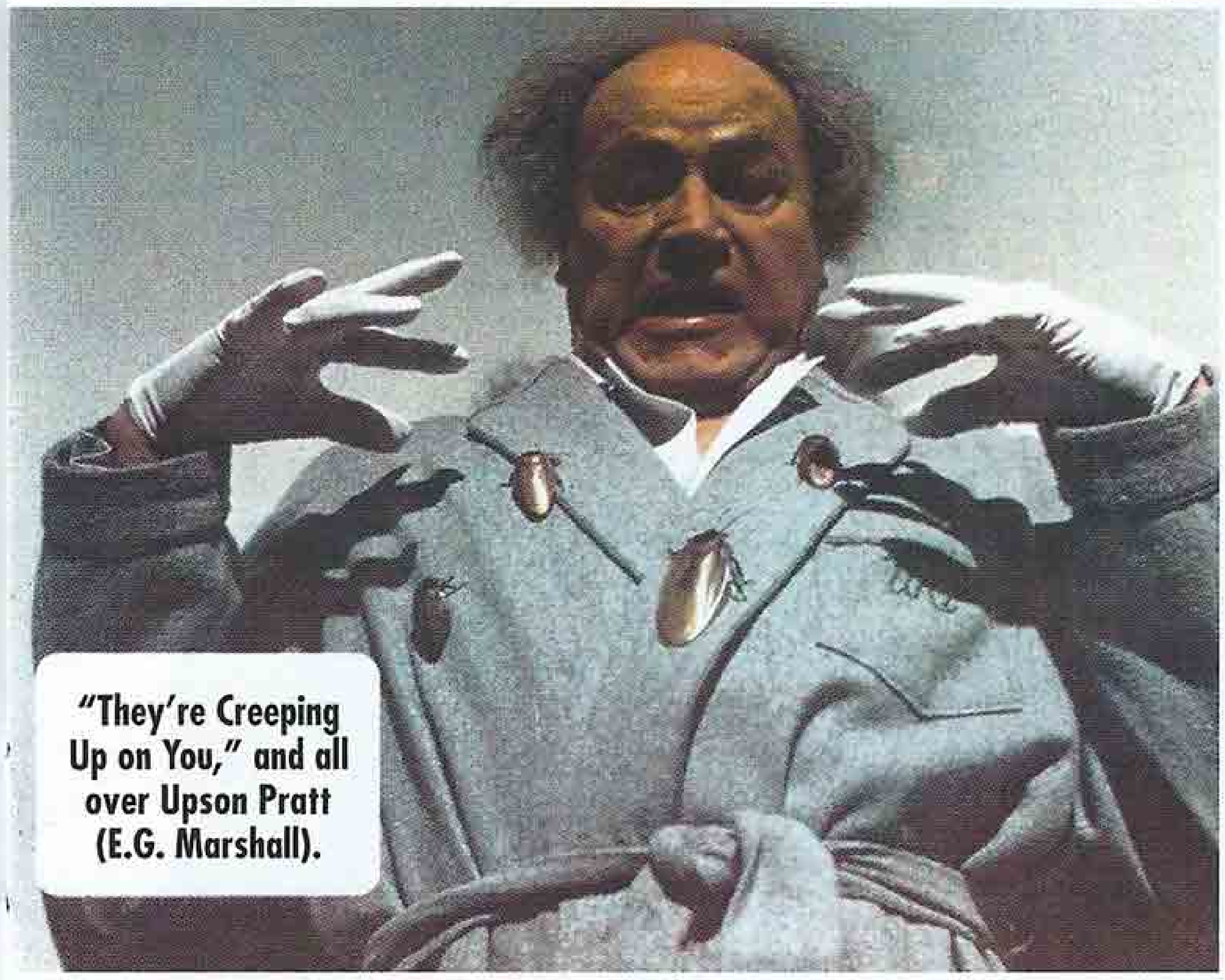
Tom Savini FX + wild comic-book lighting and backgrounds = a "Crate" time at the movies.

Photos: Copyright Warner Bros.

channel Jim Nabors and go green before it was fashionable.

"Something to Tide You Over" then switches gears for a more melancholy affair. A soap-opera love triangle sets the plot in motion, with Harry Wentworth (Ted Danson) confronted by Richard Vickers (still-a-dramatic-actor Leslie Nielsen) for sleeping with his wife Becky (*Dawn of the Dead*'s Gaylen Ross). Richard forces Harry to drive to the beach and climb into a hole, burying him neck-deep in the sand. The clearly insane Richard then makes his victim watch (via closed-circuit television) his lover drowning in the tide, a fate Harry knows awaits him next. But as is true of this film and its EC inspirations, wrongful death is cause for supernatural revenge, and no bad deed goes unpunished. Nielsen is marvelous as the voyeuristic sadist, as is Danson as the tragic, brokenhearted man who tries valiantly to rage against the dying of his light. It's a mini-melodramatic masterpiece, once again goosed by behind-the-scenes craft and love of the genre.

Starting with "Father's Day," *Creepshow* takes the cake for EC-inspired ghoulishness.



"They're Creeping Up on You," and all over Upson Pratt (E.G. Marshall).

It's followed by the longest and most dynamic entry, "The Crate," showcasing a pair of stunning performances that exemplify Romero's deft ability with actors. Hal Holbrook plays mild-mannered professor Henry, married to an absolute harpy from hell named Wilma (Adrienne Barbeau), who, for reasons happily unexplained, demands to be called Billy. One night, he gets a call to come to his university, where a student (Robert Harper) has found an ancient crate, apparently brought back from an Arctic expedition and stashed in the basement for almost a century. As he soon violently finds out, the box contains a vicious, hairy monster (which Savini nicknamed "Fluffy") that eats people and has awful manners. After cleaning up the bloodbath, Henry hatches a plan to lure his hideous, alcohol-soaked wife to the school and feed her to the beast. Hey, it's cheaper than divorce...

"The Crate" is a tour de force; Holbrook and Barbeau offer detailed, layered performances that shine even stronger against the pulp comic-book tone, Gornick makes every shot sing and Savini's work is immaculate. This is everything I love about the genre: funny, atmospheric, outrageously bloody and scary as all get out.

Jordy Verrill (Stephen King) is the ultimate grass farmer.

The finale does the title justice: In "They're Creeping Up on You," E.G. Marshall plays the hateful Upson Pratt, a Howard Hughes-esque germophobe millionaire living in an antiseptic condo, terrified of bugs. Whether due to a deteriorating mental state or a genuine infestation, Pratt is suddenly bedeviled by a legion of repulsive cockroaches (bags of these bastards were shipped in from Africa for this segment, then unceremoniously gassed before the wrap party); they crawl out of telephones and cereal boxes, from under clothes and vents, and eventually, they crawl out of...well, just watch it. Though short on plot or twists in the tail, "They're Creeping Up on You" is a titan of shocking, skin-crawling horror that will have you itching for weeks afterward.

Romero has told me that even though *Creepshow* is one of the most elaborate, risky and ultimately most flamboyant movies he's ever made, he has never felt secure about it. So careful was he, while making the picture, to honor his friendship with King and his material, he never felt he could fully ride off the rails with it. But it's that very tension and discipline that makes *Creepshow* such a masterpiece. Romero unleashed gonzo wonders in *Dawn of the Dead* and *Knightriders*, but his direction here is even more interesting, more refined and controlled, so when those wild-eyed Romero moments do break out, they seem to, I don't know, mean more. This was not the last King/Romero teamup (see *The Dark Half*, page 46), though several other collaborations, from *The Stand* to *Pet Sematary* to *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, have been prepped only to change hands or stall completely. I, for one, would love to see them work together again at least one more time.

—Chris Alexander

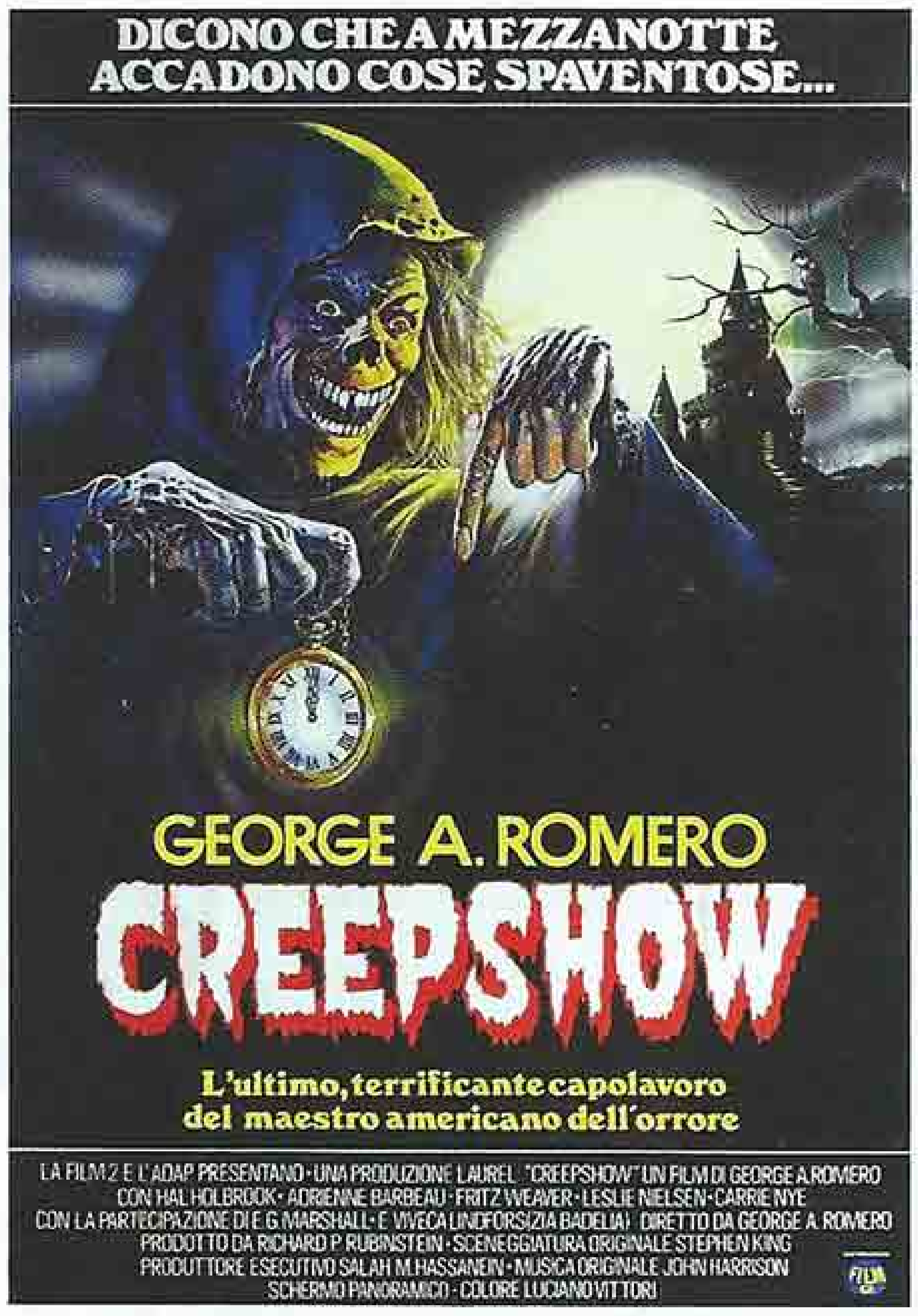
JOHN HARRISON: COMPOSING FOR CREEPSHOW

Making music for Romero's EC Comics homage was like scoring six movies in one.

By SCOOTER McCRAE

A serious genre auteur in his own right, writer, director and composer John Harrison goes back a long way with George A. Romero, and has been working with him in various capacities all through their formative years making horror movies in Pittsburgh. Among them were his scoring duties on two beloved Romero classics, *Creepshow* and *Day of the Dead* (see page 38).

"Back in the day when independent filmmaking was truly independent, George was one of the pioneers of that whole movement," recalls Harrison, whose first gig for Romero was as the "screwdriver zombie" in *Dawn of the Dead*. "We were all in Pittsburgh, and when you were making films like that, everybody had to do everything. I like to say it was the best film school I ever went to, because I never actually went to film school. You had to learn everything—you didn't specialize, because you couldn't.


DICONO CHE A MEZZANOTTE ACCADONO COSE SPAVENTOSE...
GEORGE A. ROMERO
CREEPSHOW
L'ultimo, terrificante capolavoro del maestro americano dell'orrore
LA FILM 2 E L'ADAP PRESENTANO • UNA PRODUZIONE LAUREL "CREEPSHOW" UN FILM DI GEORGE A. ROMERO
CON HAL HOLBROOK • ADRIENNE BARBEAU • FRITZ WEAVER • LESLIE NIELSEN • CARRIE NYE
CON LA PARTECIPAZIONE DI E.G. MARSHALL • E VIVECA LINDFORS(ZIA BADELIA) DIRETTO DA GEORGE A. ROMERO
PRODOTTO DA RICHARD P. RUBINSTEIN • SCENEGGIATURA ORIGINALE STEPHEN KING
PRODUTTORE ESECUTIVO SALAH M. HASSANEIN • MUSICA ORIGINALE JOHN HARRISON
SCHERMO PANORAMICO • COLORE LUCIANO VITTORI

"George was the kind of guy who really wanted to work with people who were enthusiastic about doing this, because it was hard and there was no money," Harrison continues. "So he had to have the right chemistry. He had to cast the crew as well as the actors. I just happened to be the guy with a piano, so when it came time and we needed some music, I went to George and said, 'Look, I've got this gear and I think I can help out on these things,' and one thing led to the next and that was it. Fortunately, he liked what I was doing."

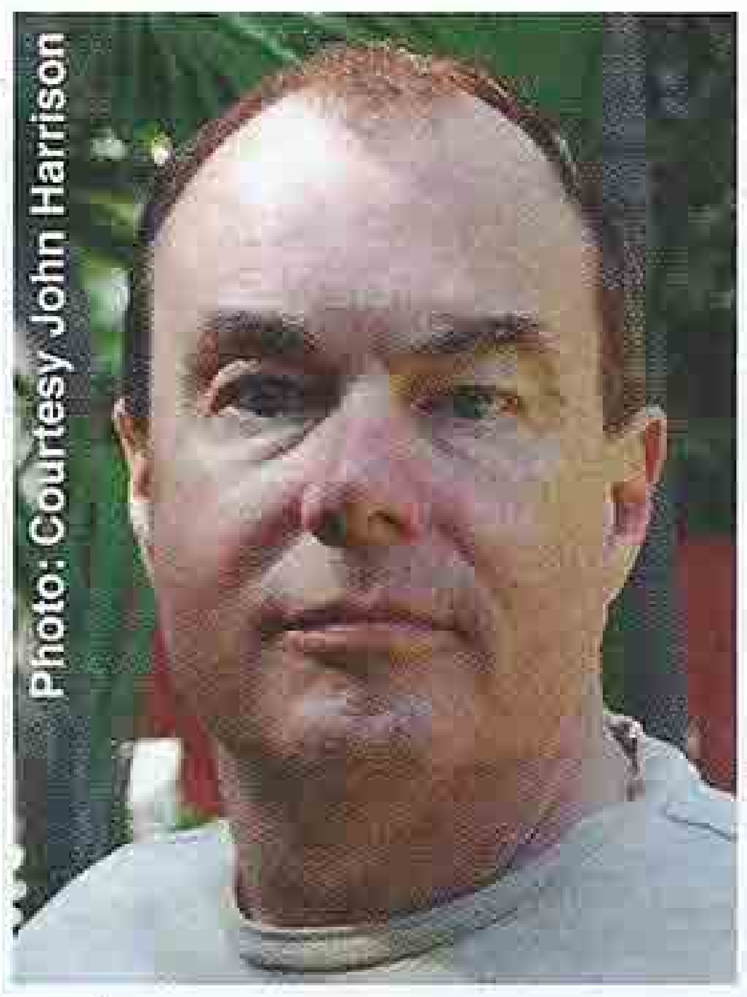


Photo: Courtesy John Harrison

That aforementioned piano is the same instrument he had used to create the effective score for another movie from Pittsburgh's independent film movement, *Effects* (which he also memorably co-starred in). Harrison's moody keyboard work certainly gave Romero some idea of what he could expect from the man who would eventually become his composer for *Creepshow*, though at first, the director had a very different approach he wanted to try.

"Originally, George wanted to use library music from various sources. He has an incredible musical sense. First of all, he loves film music and has a great collection of soundtracks, and he was able to cut these things together and make really interesting scores out of pre-existing tracks. Because *Creepshow* has that kind of comic-book flavor, he thought it would be cool to use those old 1950s pieces and put together a soundtrack based on those. Unfortunately, when we got the material, some cues would work for a few seconds of the scene and then fall apart, and the fidelity of the cues wasn't very good.

"So my original intention, with my equipment, was to help the fidelity—I could goose up certain elements of the tracks. I would also create interstitial music to link one cue to the next. But as fate would have it, one thing led to the next, and it ended up being, 'Well, I'll just write a cue for this.' And with my own gear, I could temp-score the entire movie, which is what we did. I set up in the editing rooms, and whenever George or [editor] Pat Buba would finish a section or a scene, they'd turn it over to me and I'd work on it for a while. I could continue to revise the score to the picture as it was being finished, which was a very unusual set of circumstances. Most composers get the movie when it's cut and finished, and they write to that.

"Because *Creepshow* has that comic-book flavor, [Romero originally] thought it would be cool to use old 1950s pieces."

"Initially," he notes, "there were several editors working, so all the pieces were being cut simultaneously. But that was fairly preliminary, and then it boiled down to George and Pat Buba at the end, and it was then that I really started scoring most of the movie. It wasn't like I could finish with 'The Lonesome Death of Jordy Verrill' and move on to 'The Crate,' because they were going back and forth. I would spend most of the time in the early compositional phase working on one piece

Photo: Copyright United Film Distribution

What a screwy way to start your film career... (Harrison in *Dawn of the Dead*) and trying to come up with the signature sound for that episode, and then I would go back and polish it. It's a funny process; a lot of times, what I do is sit down and noodle, just playing around. I'm not writing to picture, I'm just trying to come up with ideas. I'm not sure it was even intentional to come up with something as ersatz classical as 'The Crate,' but I liked that piano theme and started playing with it, and the rest evolved. Once I got the picture, then of course I had to adapt it to the beats of the movie.

"The laying down of the tracks—me performing it and recording to multitrack—took about a week, and then maybe another week to mix it. And although George wasn't there for the recording or the mixing, he knew what we were doing because I'd temp-tracked the whole thing. Then, once we had all the tracks fully mixed, we set up an editing suite at Todd AO in LA, where we were mixing the film. In fact, I brought my instruments out and set them up on the soundstage, and there are a couple of cues where I'm actually playing along with the film on the mixing stage, where we needed a piece to bridge a gap we hadn't thought of before."

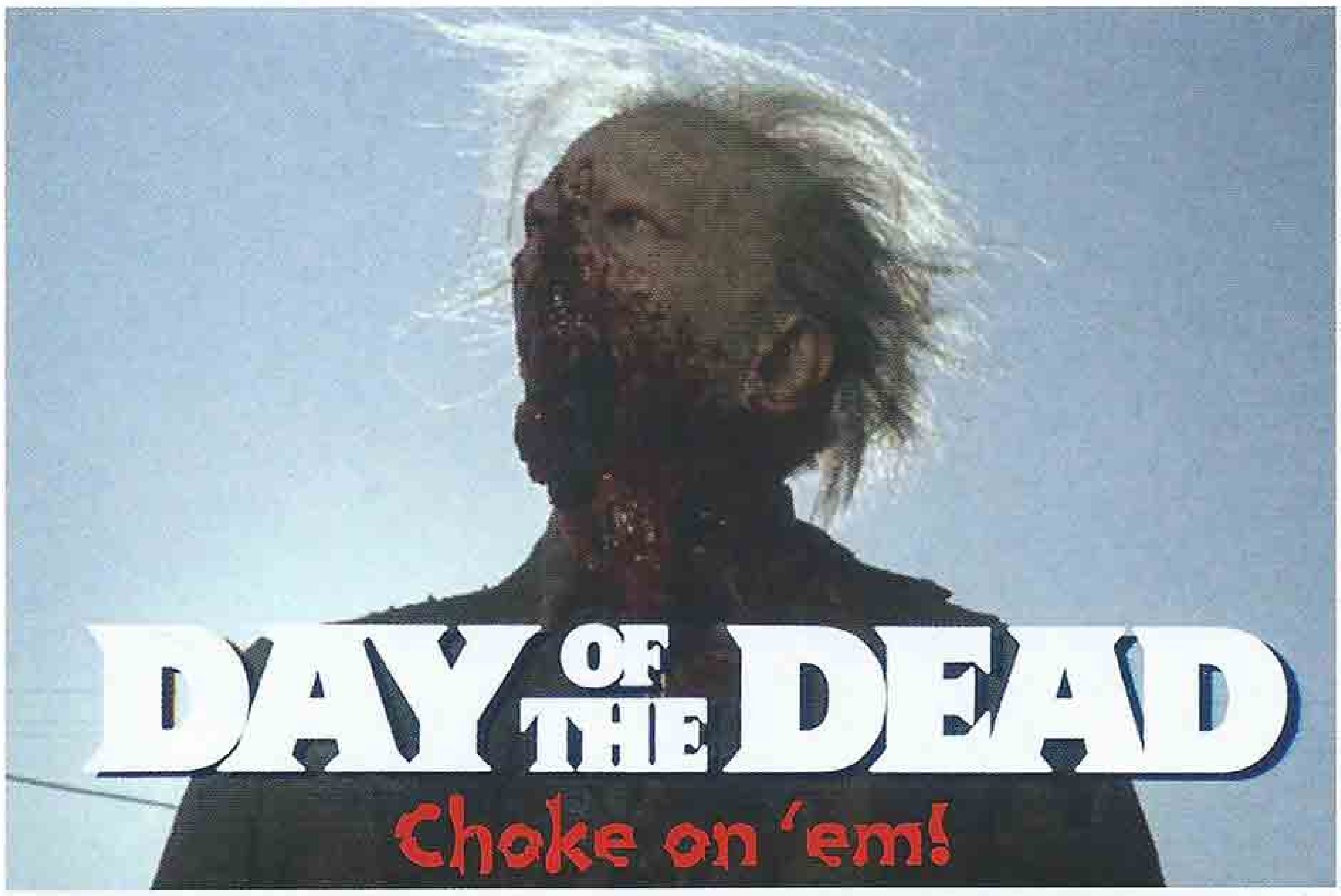
Creepshow Photos: Copyright Warner Bros.

The Creep has many different tales of terror to tell, all ably scored by John Harrison.

In addition to composing *Creepshow*'s music, Harrison was also Romero's assistant director for the project—a rare luxury that gave him almost unlimited access to his director's ear throughout the entire production process. "You've gotta remember that George is a great collaborator and a dear friend, so we always have great communication. And to have the opportunity as a composer to be at his side during the filmmaking and postproduction is a liberty most composers never have with their directors. You can create a shorthand with your partner and tailor the music to his vision of the film. But that's not really the rule; that's the exception. It's his artistic talent. He's an incredibly literate guy, used to be a painter, and he loves soundtracks. Even though he's not a musician himself and doesn't play an instrument, he has an incredible musical sense, so he's very conversant with what music can do."

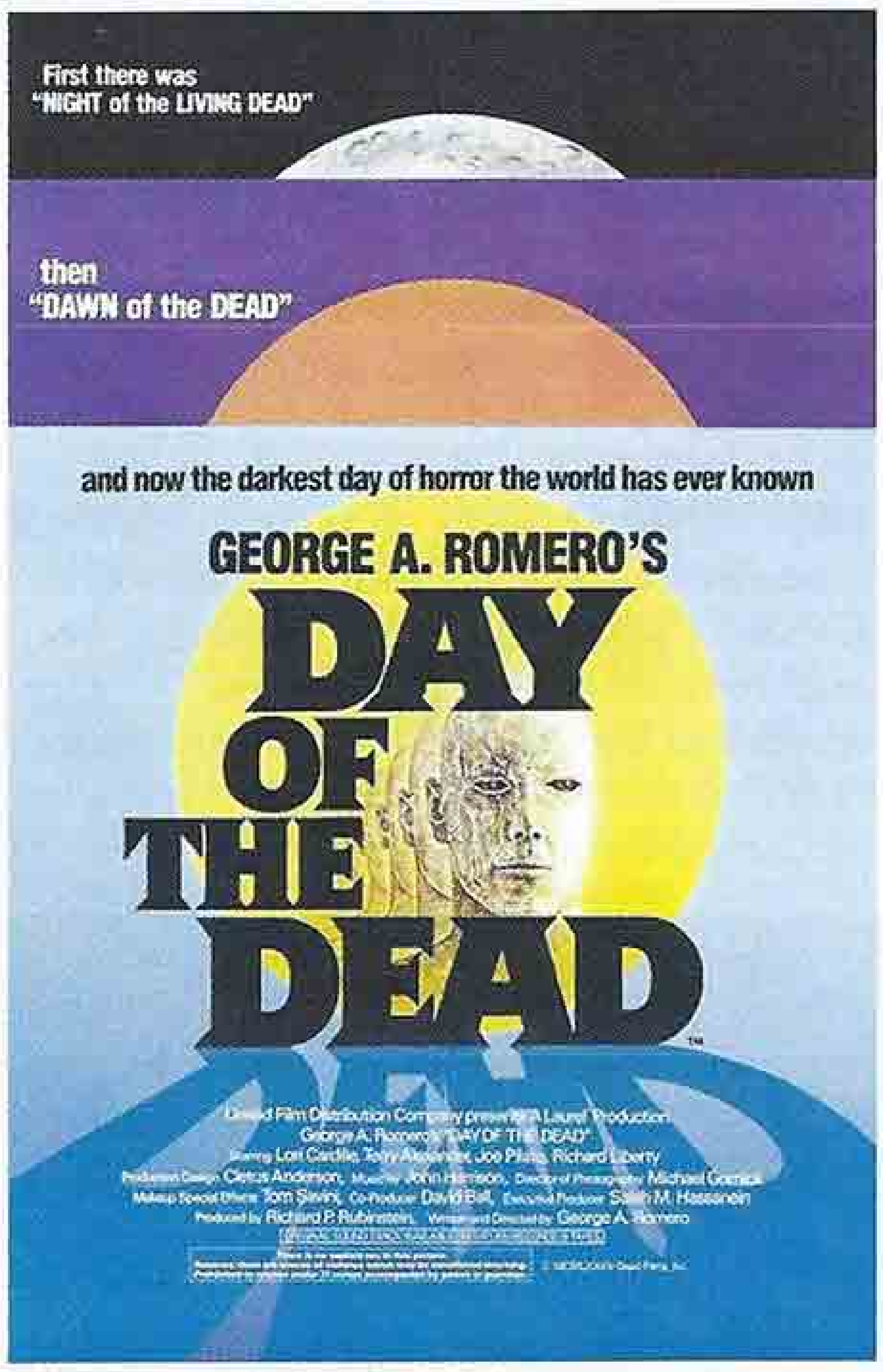
The music for *Creepshow* works as a complementary score, explicitly supporting and enhancing the on-screen action, while Harrison's *Day of the Dead* tracks seem, more often than not, like they're providing a much-needed emotional contrast while filling in subtle character details. "*Creepshow* is a tongue-in-cheek kinda score—there's a lot of humor in it," Harrison says. "And that's George. Very different from the score I did for *Day*, which has that kind of rock-'n'-roll rhythm to it and some romantic moments; it's not fun like *Creepshow* is fun."

Undead Nathan Grantham (John Amplas) wants to have his cake and eat you too.



DAY OF THE DEAD

Choke on 'em!

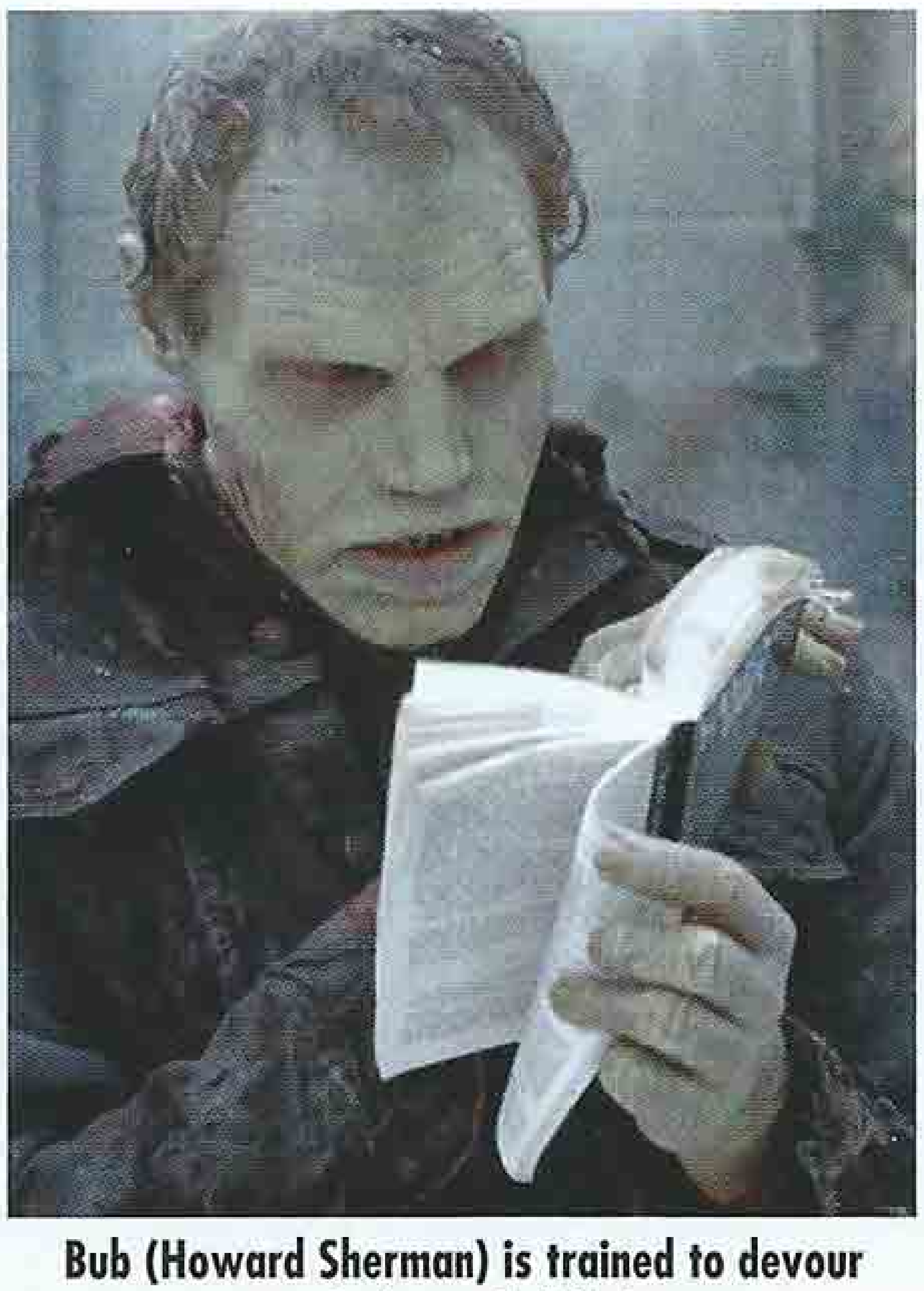

First there was
"NIGHT of the LIVING DEAD"
then
"DAWN of the DEAD"
and now the darkest day of horror the world has ever known
GEORGE A. ROMERO'S
DAY OF THE DEAD
George A. Romero's "DAY OF THE DEAD"
Starring Lori Cardille, Terry Alexander, Joe Pilato, Richard Liberty
Cletus Anderson
John Harrison
Michael Gornick
Tom Savini
David Ball
Salah M. Hassanein
Produced by Richard P. Rubinstein
George A. Romero

D*ay of the Dead* is arguably the grimmest of George A. Romero's *Dead* cycle. Sure, *Night* is in black and white, has a bleak tone and a downbeat ending, but there's still some hope that the outbreak may be contained. The action-oriented, almost cartoonish *Dawn* added welcome fun and heroics to the mix, becoming what some deem the *Star Wars* of horror films.

Then, in 1985, Uncle George snapped audiences' psyches by delivering a claustrophobic, emotionally painful vision that leaves no room for doubt: The world of the living is no longer. Rotting flesh now shambles through decayed streets, on an endless quest to fill a hunger that can never be sated. This is their world now. As that blowing newspaper says, "The Dead Walk!"

The basic premise of *Day* is simple: The dead have completely overrun the living, and a military element and a group of research scientists hole up in an underground bunker, keeping up the pretense of trying to find a cure for the Lazarus syndrome. It's obvious, though, that the operation is going nowhere, and as each day passes, the survivors grow more and more agitated and threadbare. In these underground caverns, a "three-mile-long tombstone," things are breaking down fast and reaching critical mass; resources are dwindling and time is running out.

Exacerbating the dilemma are Army Captain Rhodes (Joe Pilato), ready to pull the plug and make a break for it with his remaining men, and chief scientist Dr. Logan (Richard Liberty), who has begun training his undead specimens like flesh-eating pets. Each man is as egotistical and crazy as the other, locked in a battle with nothing to win but oblivion. The only true voices of sanity come from the duo of John (Terry Alexander) and McDermott (Jarlath Conroy), the island-born chopper pilot and his rummy communications-man sidekick, who have removed themselves from the situation, and scientist Sarah (Lori Cardille), who struggles to keep the program on the rails and refuses to give up hope for a true solution.



Bub (Howard Sherman) is trained to devour words instead of limbs.

When *Day* first hit theaters—the same summer as the Romero sendup *The Return of the Living Dead*—it pretty much blindsided its intended audience with extreme gore, ratcheted up about 10 notches from *Dawn*'s splatter, and emotionally volatile pathos. For the glossy, post-*Beverly Hills Cop* '80s, this was total cinematic nihilism. Right from the opening images of Sarah's nightmare, with hands coming through a wall to grab her, to her waking up in a chopper only to find herself pulled back into a horrible reality where the dead eat the living—as she goes on yet another fruitless recon to look for survivors—viewers immediately knew this was going to be one particularly dark journey, even by Romero's standards.

No one has to tell Captain Rhodes (Joe Pilato) where to shoot 'em.

Then the zombie affectionately (infectionately?) known as Dr. Tongue shows up, backlit by the harsh and unforgiving sun, and turns to profile; we see he has no jaw and his tongue just hangs there, lolling and wagging, as the title splays across the screen and a music sting, courtesy of composer John Harrison, jars our senses. These weren't the blue-faced zombies from *Dawn*; these were fully sculpted ghouls, now completely displaying their personalities and injuries. FX maestro Tom Savini pulled out all the prosthetic stops (and intestines!) this time around, with some truly shocking work, topping his own demented artistry on *Dawn* and anything seen in any zombie movie before.

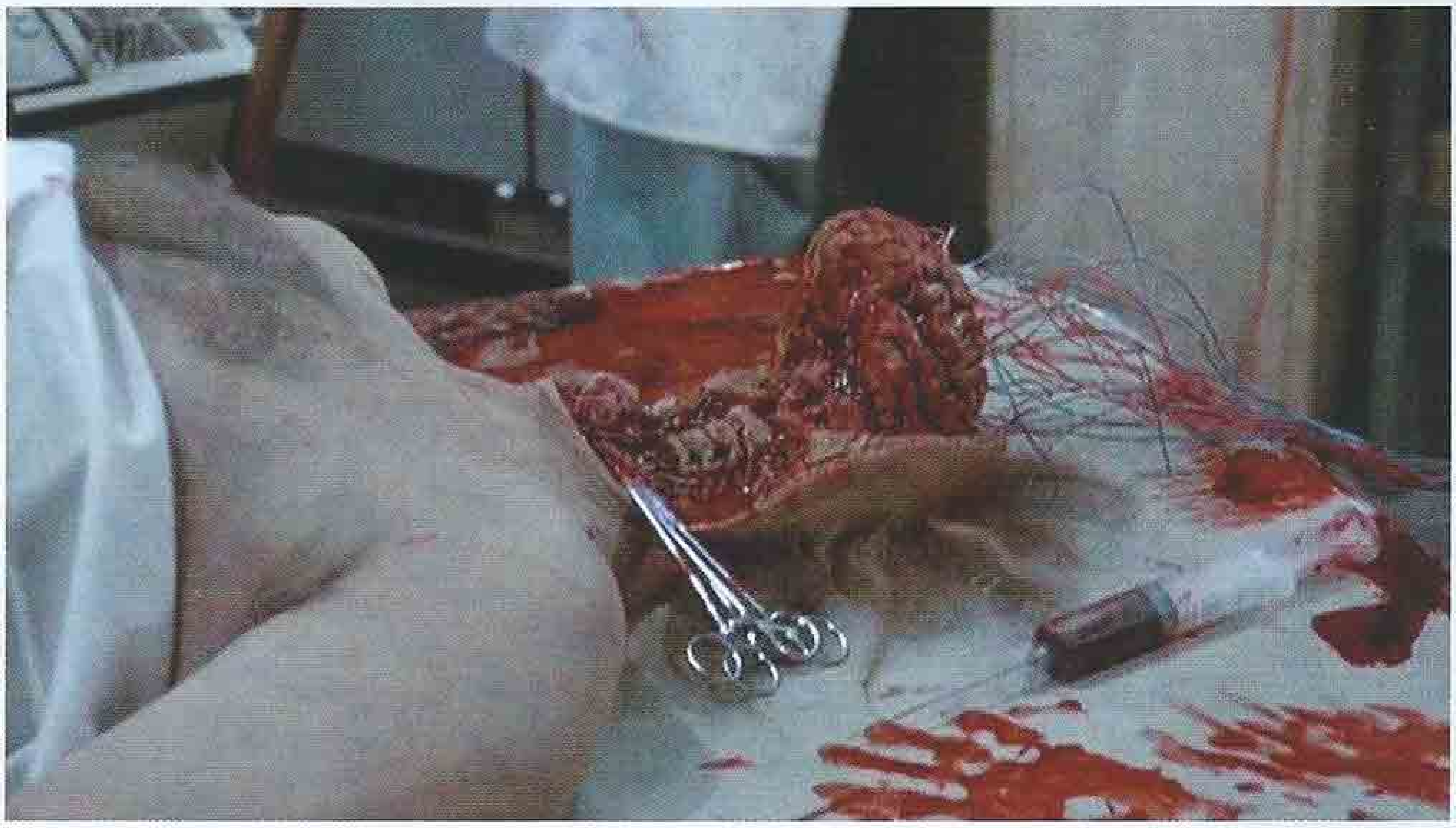
Let's talk about some of those zombies…

The ghoul whose head consists of nothing but a brain attached to a spinal column. The dead guy who spills his guts, reaching at us, as he tries to climb off the hospital gurney. And maybe the single greatest creation in zombiedom ever… Bub. Actor Sherman Howard (then known as Howard Sherman!) imbues this role with a level of poignancy, sensitivity and intelligence that would make Lon Chaney proud. Intricately layered and physically mind-boggling, Bub remains one of the

Photos: Copyright United Film Distribution

greatest creature performances in cinema history, on a level with Frankenstein's Monster and King Kong.

Now, one of the most interesting elements of *Day of the Dead*, to this writer as an adult, is its relation to the military satire that was prevalent from the late '60s until the early '80s: Robert Altman's *M*A*S*H* and Mike Nichols' *Catch-22* spring immediately to mind. This is no surprise, given Romero's admittedly hippie-esque outlook, and his having been part of the generation who watched the Vietnam war play across the evening news night after night, as cynicism about our leaders grew and belief in the American dream crumbled away. The oxymoron of "military intelligence" comes to full fruition in *Day of the Dead.* Hell, the enemy is even deceased, yet still undefeated, due in major part to our government's armed forces being unable to work in concert. We can even view *Day*'s flesheating hordes as the native peasantry, if we just squint a little.



Tom Savini must have had a good head on his shoulders to pull off *Day of the Dead*'s makeup illusions.

The world's living population may be down to a handful of unbalanced soldiers and half-blood-crazed scientists, but Romero doesn't settle for the clichés of brains vs. brawn. Most commentary on the film glosses over *Day*'s condemnation of the arrogance of the medical field as well; the white-coats also get their due under the sarcastic eye of our beloved Uncle George. As with anything, it takes two to tango, and the situation in the bunker is also due in part to some very shady behavior on the part of *Day*'s chief surgeon. Logan, nicknamed Dr. Frankenstein, is portrayed as a distraught, self-centered, wasteful man who endangers his team by covertly chopping up dead soldiers and employing them in his increasingly bizarre experiments, using his search for a cure as the excuse. Really, he is just ego-tripping on his own theories and hangs his entire direction of research on the relatively small accomplishment of having trained Bub not to eat him.

Wrapping up the initial trilogy with one of the greatest climactic setpieces of any horror film, as the zombie hordes are led into the bunker by an infected soldier, containing dialogue sounding like it was written by the unholy horror offspring of David Mamet and Tennessee Williams and featuring what are arguably the strongest performances in the series, *Day of the Dead* is the jewel in the crown of one of the greatest film series of all time.

—Sean Smithson

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MUSIC FOR THE DEAD

Three years after the release of *Creepshow*, John Harrison (see page 34) got the opportunity to once again be George A. Romero's assistant director and create the score for the last film of his initial zombie trilogy, *Day of the Dead*. The original script for this project was infamously huge in scope compared to the previous *Dead* films—but a compromise had to be reached between the director and his producers to get the funding he needed, while also maintaining that his film remain uncut and unrated, like *Dawn*. In having that artistic request fulfilled, Romero's budget was cut in half.

But Harrison did not let this budgetary change of plans affect the ideas he and Romero had initially discussed when *Day* was a much different film. "The origin of that score goes back to the first script George wrote for *Day of the Dead*, which was a much larger enterprise," the composer says. "It took place almost entirely in Florida, in this community he envisioned, which later was reimagined for *Land of the Dead*. I thought we should go against type, because of that original script, and George said, 'Yeah, let's go for it.' So I wrote some music with that script in mind, which is actually the main theme. I sent it to him, and he loved it.

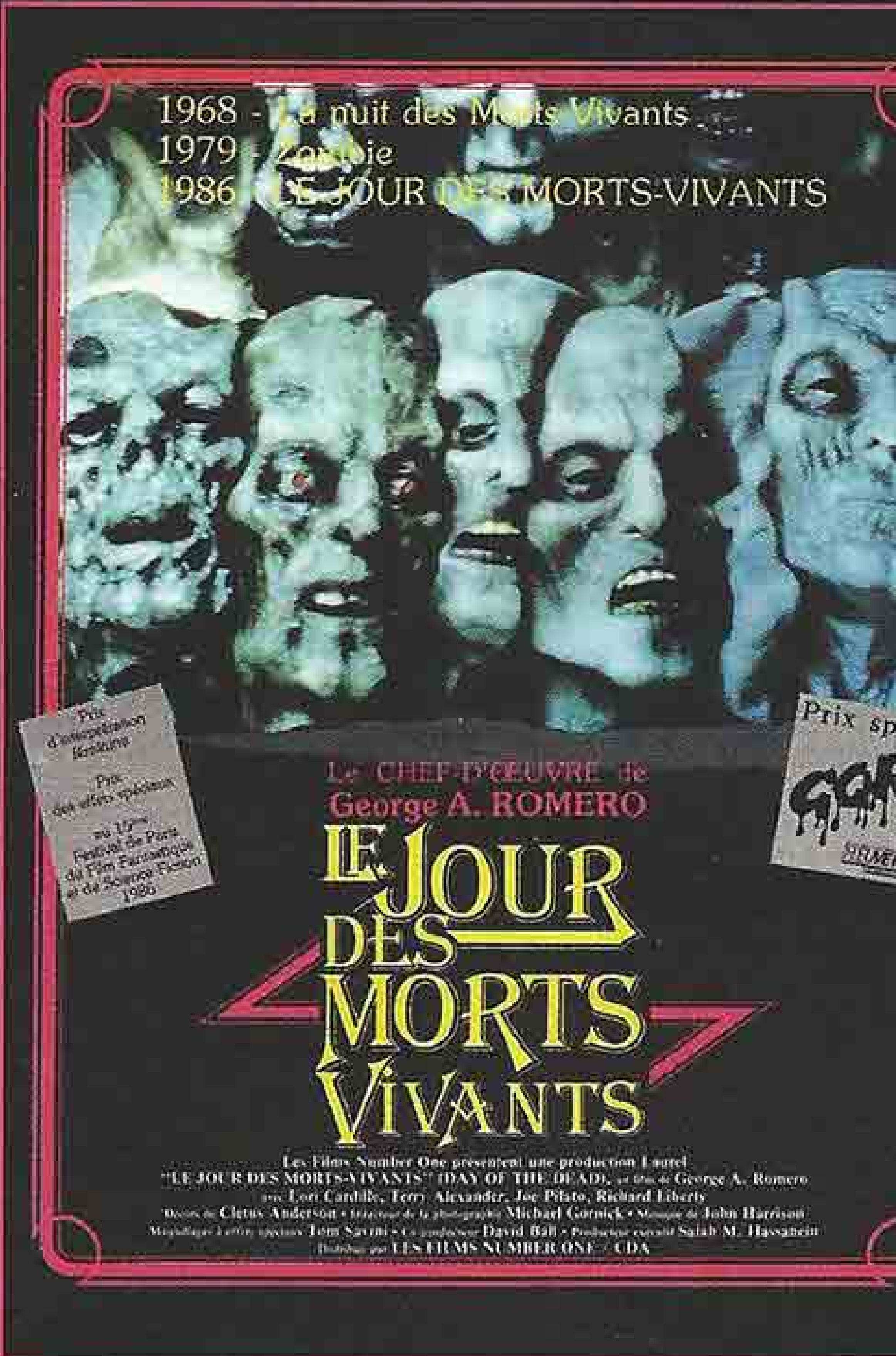
"Then we went through a period of time where the movie didn't get funded, and when it did it had to be a much smaller budget, so he had to rewrite the movie. Well, what were we gonna do at that point? He still had Terry Alexander using a Caribbean accent, so we decided to stick with the music. And that's how it all came about.

"I know there are a lot of people who don't like the score because of that choice," Harrison concedes. "It was intended to be, not a mitigating factor against the horror, but a different way of looking at it. I thought, if we had just gone for the straight horror, a movie that size… I wanted to help give it a wider feel. And I wanted it to help say to audiences that this is not just a movie for the fanboys, because I don't look at horror that way. I love archetypal storytelling, and that's why I've always been drawn to horror, and I've never thought of it as this limited genre; some people do, and the violence and gore sometimes turns them off. The kinds of films I was brought up on were Val Lewton movies, Robert Wise's *The Haunting*. They were mainstream, and I didn't see any reason why we should relegate our films to some kind of limited genre. And I thought, maybe the music could be a signifier to audiences that this wasn't going to be just crazy shock beats and weird violins; it's broader than that."

Once again, the opportunity to be George's assistant director kept things interesting for Harrison. "The great thing about being his AD again was being constantly by his side, so we could always be talking. George is an incredible mimic, so when we'd be sitting on the set between takes and setups, he'd start humming away like a trombone or a tuba, and it would be little ideas he spontaneously came up with—and I'm telling you, I'd pay attention."

Photo: Copyright United Film Distribution

Day of the Dead **required John Harrison to compose plenty of dinner music.**


1968 - La nuit des Morts Vivants
1979 - Zombie
1986 - LE JOUR DES MORTS-VIVANTS
Prix d'interprétation féminine
Prix des effets spéciaux
au 15ème Festival de Paris du Film Fantastique et de Science-Fiction 1986
Prix spécial
GORE
Le CHEF-D'ŒUVRE de
George A. ROMERO
LE JOUR DES MORTS VIVANTS
Les Films Number One présentent une production Laurel
"LE JOUR DES MORTS-VIVANTS" (DAY OF THE DEAD), un film de George A. Romero
avec Lori Cardille, Terry Alexander, Joe Pilato, Richard Liberty
Décors de Cletus Anderson • Directeur de la photographie Michael Gornick • Musique de John Harrison
Maquillages à effets spéciaux Tom Savini • Co-producteur David Ball • Producteur exécutif Salah M. Hassanein
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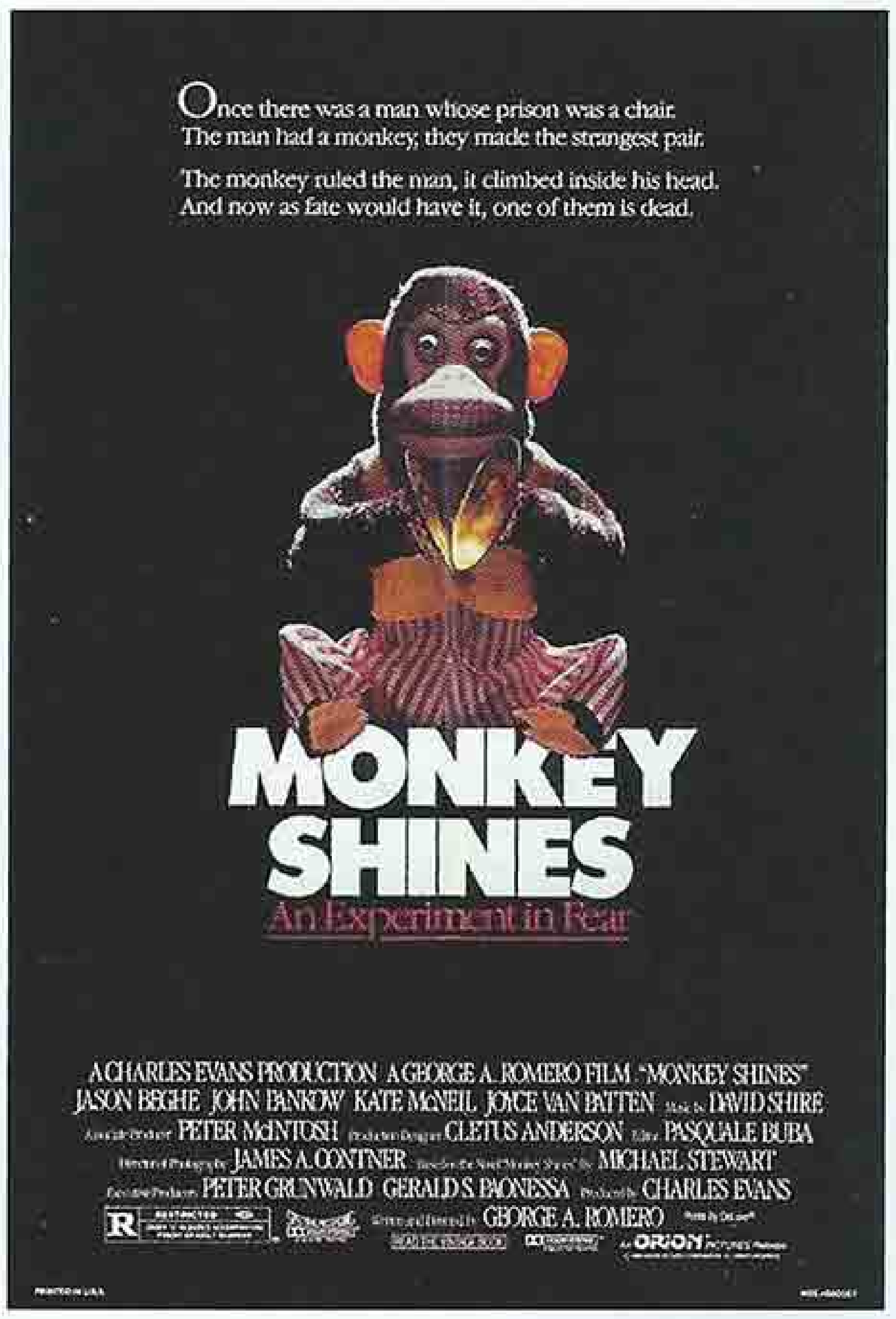
"When we were doing post on *Day*," he continues, "I moved into the editing suite again and did the same thing I did with *Creepshow*, temping the whole movie with George and Pat [Buba, editor]. I was downstairs in my little cave and they were upstairs in their editing room, and they'd come down and slip a scene in through the mail slot and I'd watch it. And with my little four-track tape recorder and mixer, I'd record it and take it upstairs, transfer it over to mag and lay it against the picture. So by the time I went into the studio in Los Angeles, I'd pretty much written the whole damn score and seen it to picture and George had signed off on it, so it was just a matter of rerecording it to sound great."

All these years later, Romero and Harrison (as a director himself) have continued doing the work they both love, creating compelling movies along the way. And while continuing to leave their individual marks upon the genre we love, their career paths have not crossed in far too long. "George has been one of my dear friends for years and years, and beyond that, he really has been my mentor," Harrison says. "He helped launch my career. He gave me opportunities I might never have had otherwise—not only in music, but to write and direct. You're very lucky to find that in your career. As I was starting out—and this was true for a lot of us—that period was the best film school you could possibly have, and George allowed you to do what your talents would allow you to do. So there is a big part of my career that George Romero owns."

—Scooter McCrae

MONKEY SHINES

Animal distractions


Once there was a man whose prison was a chair.
The man had a monkey, they made the strangest pair.
The monkey ruled the man, it climbed inside his head.
And now as fate would have it, one of them is dead.
MONKEY SHINES
An Experiment in Fear
A CHARLES EVANS PRODUCTION A GEORGE A. ROMERO FILM "MONKEY SHINES"
JASON BEGHE JOHN PANKOW KATE McNEIL JOYCE VAN PATTEN DAVID SHIRE
PETER McINTOSH CLETUS ANDERSON PASQUALE BUBA
JAMES A. CONTNER MICHAEL STEWART
PETER GRUNWALD GERALD S. PAONESSA CHARLES EVANS
R
GEORGE A. ROMERO
ORION

Perhaps feeling like zombie movies were a monkey on his back, Romero switched directions in 1988.

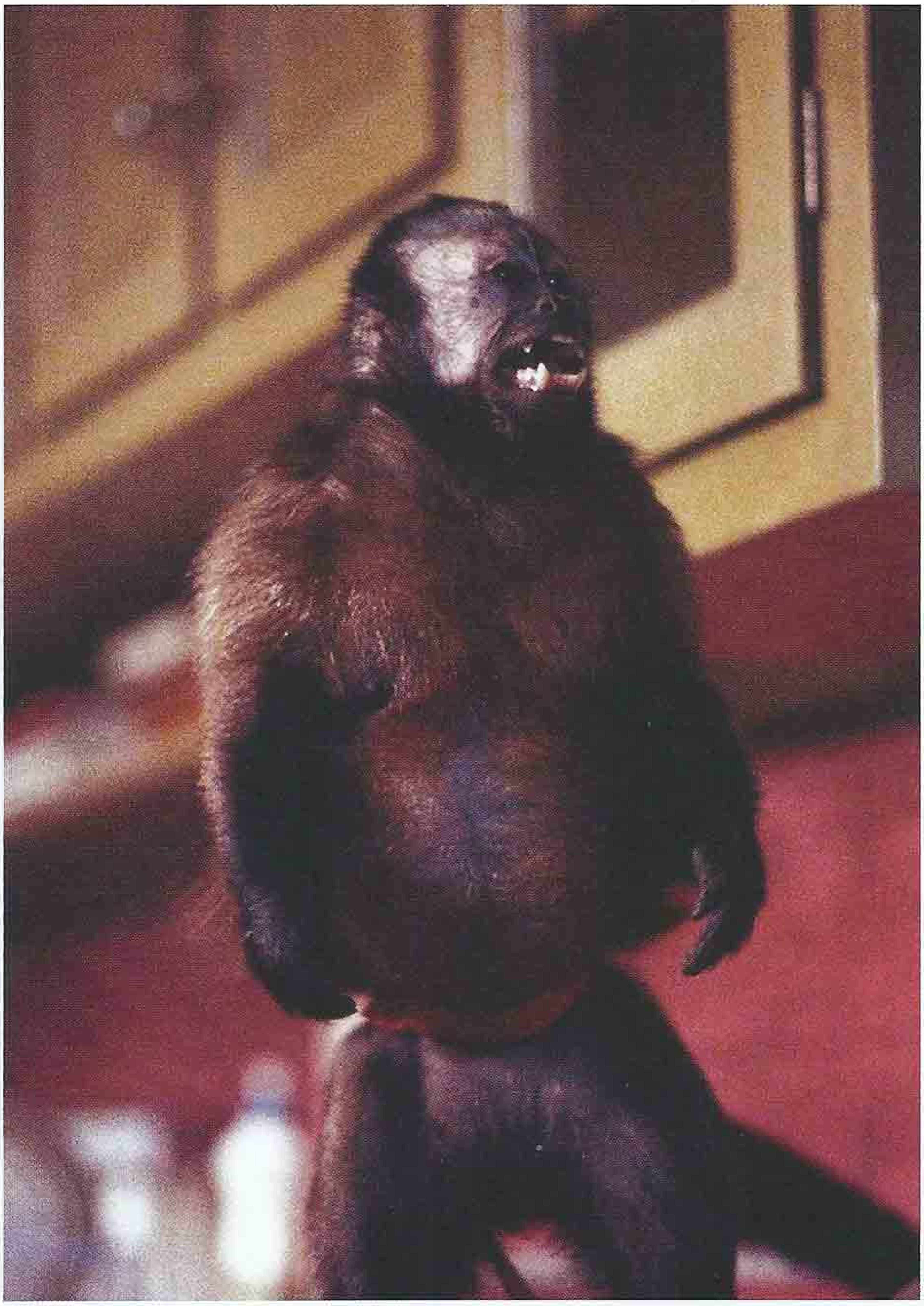
There's nothing sadder than the lack of box-office success for 1988's *Monkey Shines*. This was the perfect crossover project for George A. Romero to finally achieve mainstream recognition and reap the box-office rewards, but instead—despite an effectively lurid and memorable ad campaign that nonetheless may have done more harm than good in the end—audiences stayed away in droves. It's sadder still when one considers that this more overtly kinder and gentler Romero film manages to create likable characters, and generate shocks and genuine suspense, without compromising its intelligence. *Monkey Shines* is a smart piece of entertainment that deserved so much more attention.

The film sported what was at that point Romero's largest budget, and the production value allowed the director to reveal a previously unseen side of his cinematic talents. For while the film's look benefits from the advantages that more subtle lighting setups and dolly tracks allow, these tools let Romero's storytelling skills flourish, instead of giving him enough rope to hang himself, like some other low-budget directors have in similar circumstances. Where previously Romero was more likely to have to tell the story in the editing, here he could let his camera move freely through a room to generate suspense or reveal important details within a single shot—not to mention the fun of attaching the camera to a wheelchair to record the lead character's expressions of terror as he moves through the darkened prison that was once his own home.

One thing that was not abandoned by the director was the broadness of characterization that lets us immediately know who the good guys and bad guys are, and in this he's ably assisted by fine performances by Jason Beghe (as Allan, a quadriplegic young man given a monkey to assist him, which comes to channel his anger and then turn against him) and John Pankow (as the scientist overseeing the project), among others, who seem quite committed to the project and aren't afraid to go all the way with it. Special kudos to Beghe and Kate McNeil for making one of the most unique sex scenes in any genre film effectively poignant while maintaining a sense of humor.

And then there's Ella, played by Boo, the show-stealing capuchin monkey that's one of the great screen animal characters. Between the monkey's able performance, deft shooting and editing and subtle assistance from Tom Savini's most

Ella's *Monkey Shines* include popping up in her master's dreams.



Ella (Boo) doesn't need to be Kong-sized to elicit king-sized chills.

invisible makeup achievements, the poor creature goes from being beloved companion to hapless tormentor over the terrifying course of the movie. Indeed, one of the ironies of the film turns out to be that it's man's best friend—here an aggressive dog that jumps out at and distracts the main character as he's jogging—which is the cause of the accident that sets the story into motion, while it's the unnaturally tamed version of a wild beast (Ella) that is groomed to become his nurturing caretaker—with equally disastrous results. In the end, even the most benign-seeming animal is a victim of its own non-human lack of intelligence—suggesting that the most cunning and deadly animal of all is us.

Understated visual details are sprinkled throughout: The indentation in Allan's beard growth, worn into a corner of his lip hair by the wheelchair's joystick-steering mechanism he manipulates with his mouth, and the appearance of sharp canine teeth on Allan, during anger fits that link him to the rages he begins to experience in Ella's presence, are the kind of touches that reward attentive viewers.

It's these sharpened teeth that give the film one of its most transgressively beautiful images: When Allan bites his own lip so hard that it bleeds, and Ella runs over to lick the blood from his mouth in what plays as a moment of romantic beastiality. It's a literalization of a classic beauty-and-the-beast moment that is disquietingly uncomfortable.

The visual restraint when it comes to depicting violence is quite admirable, and seems like an honest choice by Romero to confuse audience expectations, for those who might have been counting on something a lot gorier from the director of *Dawn of the Dead.* For example, the car accident that sets the plot in motion depicts the moment of impact as a graceful, almost ballet-like event—a bloodless spinning in the air punctuated by the heavy bricks Allan carries in his backpack as part of his exercise routine providing visual splatter when they hit the ground and shatter into pieces in slow motion. The first sliver of blood we do finally get is a scalpel slicing into flesh for an operation, a sight the camera quickly cuts away from before it gets too intense. This expert misdirection leaves viewers unprepared for what will eventually be unleashed upon them later in the film.

When the violence does arrive at the end—in a moment that is simultaneously exhilarating in its primitive power (I applaud every time I see it) and jaw-dropping in its intense depiction of momentary insanity—it is the perfect payoff to the buildup of emotional distress and outright terrorization perpetrated by the little capuchin critter. It's like some kind of Michael Bay explosion at the climax of an Ingmar Bergman film—totally unexpected but emotionally and dramatically fulfilling. The most important thing to note about *Monkey Shines,* however, is that it marked the first collaboration between Romero and Peter Grunwald—the producer who got the director back to work on a series of zombie-related film projects over the last several years, with hopefully more still to come.

—Scooter McCrae

Melanie (Kate McNeil) and Allan (Jason Beghe) become two points in a very bizarre "love" triangle.

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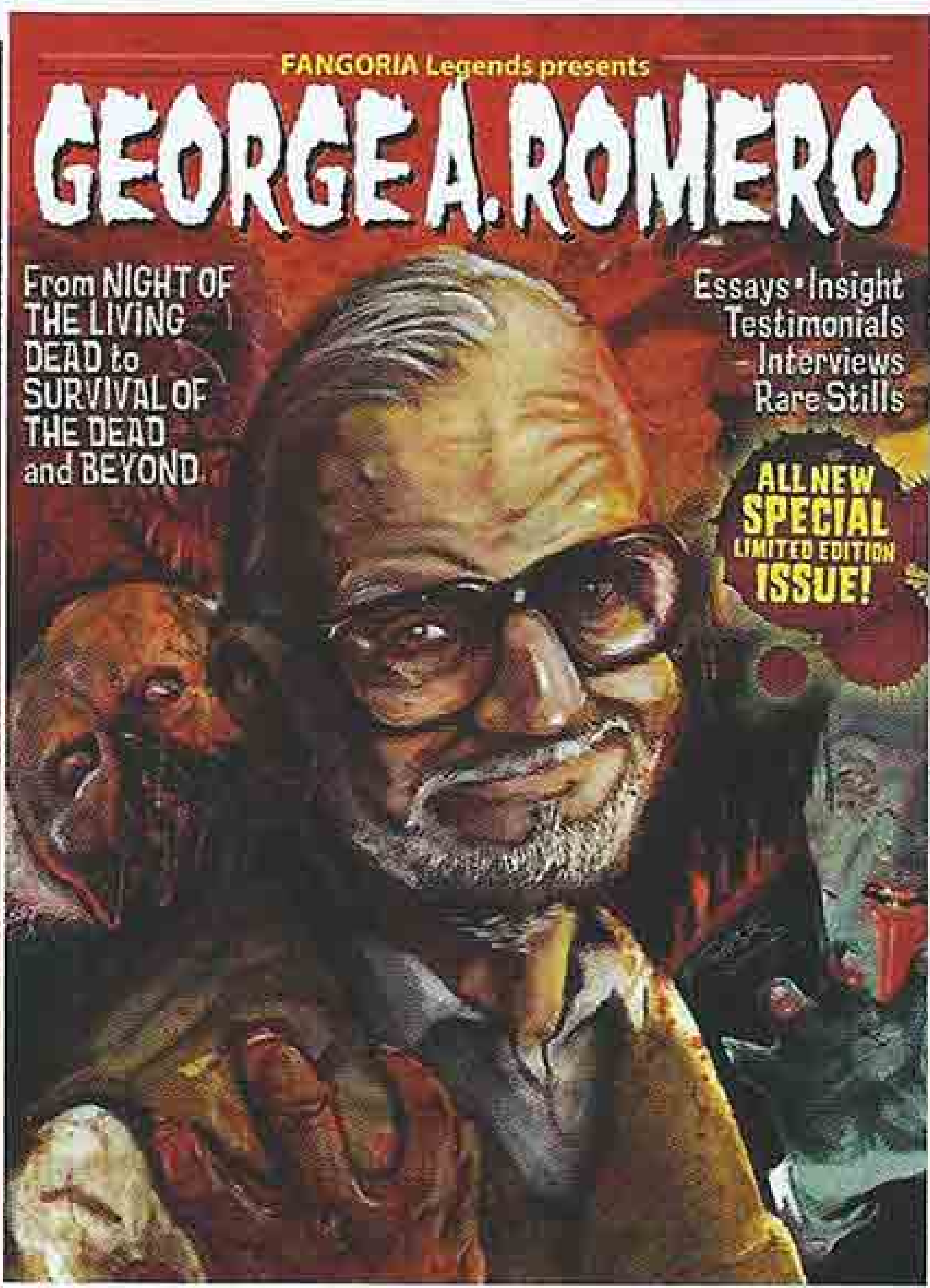
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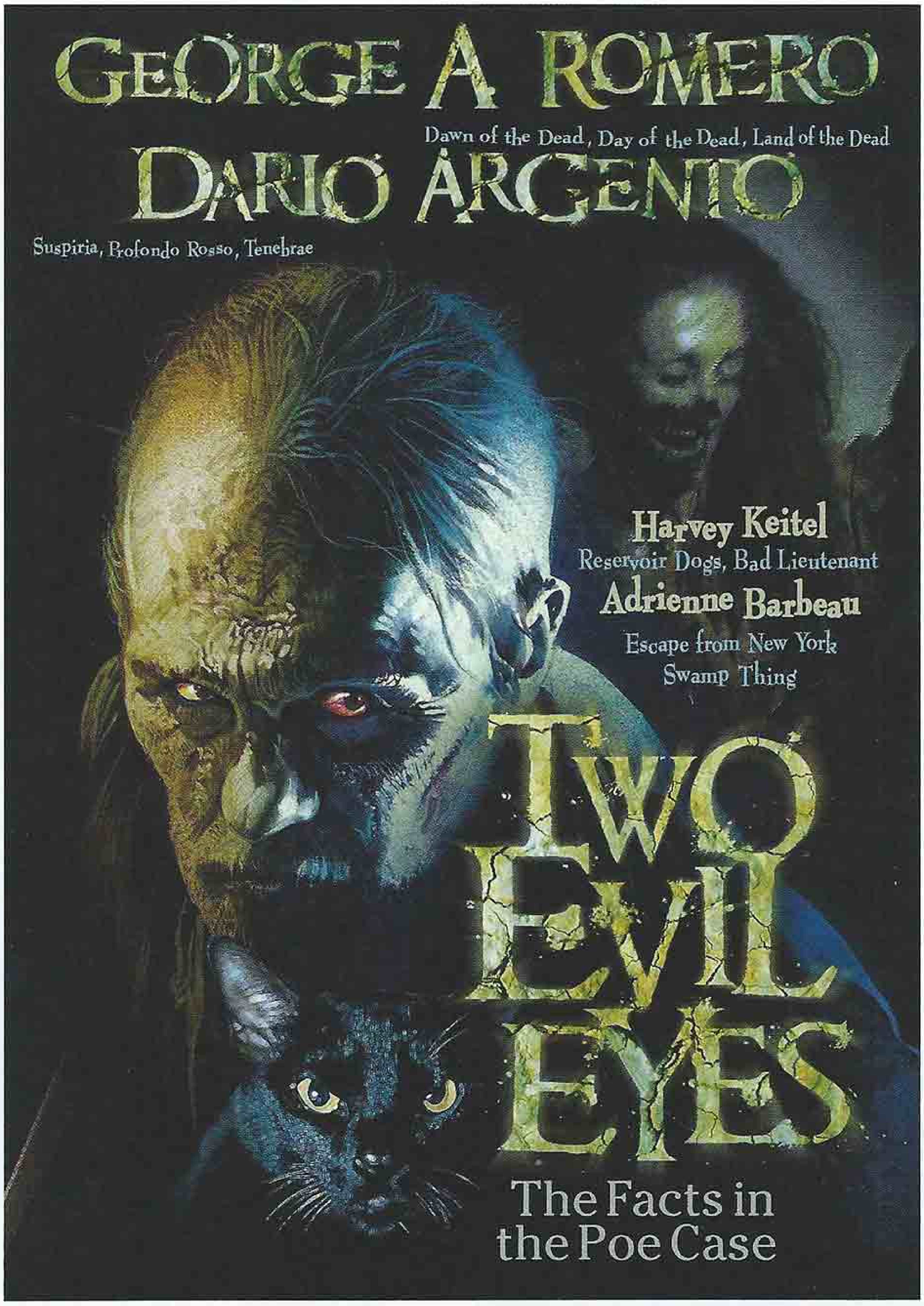

GEORGE A ROMERO
Dawn of the Dead, Day of the Dead, Land of the Dead
DARIO ARGENTO
Suspiria, Profondo Rosso, Tenebrae
Harvey Keitel
Reservoir Dogs, Bad Lieutenant
Adrienne Barbeau
Escape from New York
Swamp Thing
TWO EVIL EYES
The Facts in the Poe Case

Two Evil Eyes was almost the ultimate horror omnibus. Originally envisioned by director/producer Dario Argento as a four-segment anthology of Edgar Allan Poe-inspired tales helmed by himself, George A. Romero, John Carpenter and Wes Craven, *Eyes* had all the makings of a groundbreaking meeting of the macabre minds. But scheduling and budget constraints whittled the dream team down to a pair of friends who knew a thing or two about working together.

In an interview segment on the 2003 Blue Underground DVD release of *Eyes*, Romero recalled the phone call in 1989 that started it all: "Dario called me up one day and said, 'George, I am Dario. I want to make a movie with Poe. You make one and I make one and we make one movie from two.' " Of course, Romero had made what many consider the ultimate fright anthology seven years earlier with *Creepshow*, his ode to gore-drenched '50s genre gateway drug EC Comics, but this time around he would visit less personal territory.

"I loved the Poe stories, but was never a student," he admitted. "I don't think it really had any influence on me." While Argento came at *Eyes* with the kind of passion only someone who refers to Poe as "a spiritual father" can bring, Romero approached the material from a more practical standpoint, resulting in a trip back onto familiar terrain with his take on Poe's gruesome 1845 tale "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." But "Valdemar" wasn't the first stop for Pittsburgh's grisliest son with this project.

After signing to direct half of *Eyes*, Romero immediately went about penning a script based on his favorite Poe work, "The Masque of the Red Death," taking the familiar story headfirst into sociopolitical territory by making it a parable about the then-exploding AIDS epidemic. Argento, who was initially going to take a stab at "The Pit and the Pendulum" but ended up switching to "The Black Cat," took issue with where Romero was heading with "Masque," feeling there was too much "modern-issue influence" and not enough respect for Poe's original. After discussion, and the discovery that Roger Corman was about to set sail with his own new take on "Masque," Romero switched gears, finding much to love in what was, when it was published, Poe's most controversial story.

Romero stated quite simply, "What attracted me to 'Valdemar' was the living dead." And so it would be, four years after *Day of the Dead*, that the godfather of the resurrected would revisit the subgenre he created, albeit with a scaled-back approach compared to the expanse of *Night*, *Dawn* and *Day*.

Talking with FANGORIA before the film's release in July 1990, Romero explained the gist of the original source material and how he beefed up the story. "The premise is that some guy [Valdemar] dies under hypnosis, and that's basically all that happens in the Poe story. I built a story that has to do with Valdemar's wife and doctor, who are conspiring to cheat him out of his fortune. The story is mostly about the scheme cooked up by the wife and the doctor. I almost feel as though I'm

Photos: Copyright Taurus Entertainment

***Eyes*' walking dead is also, in a rarity for a Romero picture, the talking dead.**

shooting an episode of *Columbo*, but then the walking dead show up..."

Creepshow alum Adrienne Barbeau plays greedy Jessica Valdemar, who explains her situation quite frankly while arguing with her dying husband's banker (played by E.G. Marshall, also from *Creepshow*) about making a substantial withdrawal from her betrothed's account: "I married a rich old man. I let him use me for pleasure and for show, and now I'm going to let him pay me for my services."

Mr. Valdemar (Bingo O'Malley, yet another *Creepshow* vet) lies at home in a sick bed, hooked up to machines and barely hanging on. At his side is conniving Dr. Robert Hoffman (Ramy Zada), Jessica's lover and partner in crime. Dr. Hoffman hypnotizes Valdemar whenever the couple needs the old-timer to sign off on a withdrawal, which leads to bad things when, in the middle of hypnosis, Valdemar flatlines. Jessica and Dr. Hoffman stow the body in the basement meat freezer, unsure of what to do next, as Valdemar passed away before some critical financial paperwork could be dealt with. Soon a haunting voice is heard from the basement, and the horrified duo are forced to deal with the consequences of their gluttonous appetites when the dead come calling with gruesome results. And that isn't the end of it...

Having survived her *Creepshow* comeuppance, Adrienne Barbeau connived her way to another bad end in *Two Evil Eyes.*

Romero's normal tropes (infighting among the dastardly, financial greed, the undead, the absence of a stereotypical "hero") are on view once again, most obviously when Tom Atkins' Detective Grogan examines the bloody aftermath at Valdemar's mansion and complains, "Rich people. The sick stuff always turns out to be rich people." Atkins' quip aside, class warfare isn't really front and center as usual; horrible Jessica explains she is of humble origin, "not society," and thus, has no means to survive on her own without her wealthy benefactor's inheritance heading her way. In *Eyes*, it is actually the wealthy Valdemar who is preyed upon and rises for revenge. Since Romero added the thread about the thieving Jessica and Dr. Hoffman of his own volition, it can hardly be said that he always favors the common man in his cinema.

Unfairly overlooked, *Eyes* is often criticized for its tempo and restrained use of bloody bits, but the bottom line is: This is Romero doing what Romero does best. Sure, it's a drawn-out tale, but with great atmosphere (especially during the final confrontation), strong performances by Barbeau and Zada, great Tom Savini FX (Valdemar's popsicle corpse in particular) and a fantastic Pino Donaggio score, you're never bored. You want classic Romero zombie action? Valdemar's amble up the stairs in pursuit of Jessica is on par with any attack in the *Dead* films, only here the creature actually *talks*. It would be another 15 years before audiences would see the director get back into "stench" territory with 2005's *Land of the Dead,* but this must be acknowledged as an official entry in the Romero zombie cycle. Especially with Argento's gory hoot "The Black Cat" also in the mix, *Two Evil Eyes* is most certainly not to be dismissed.

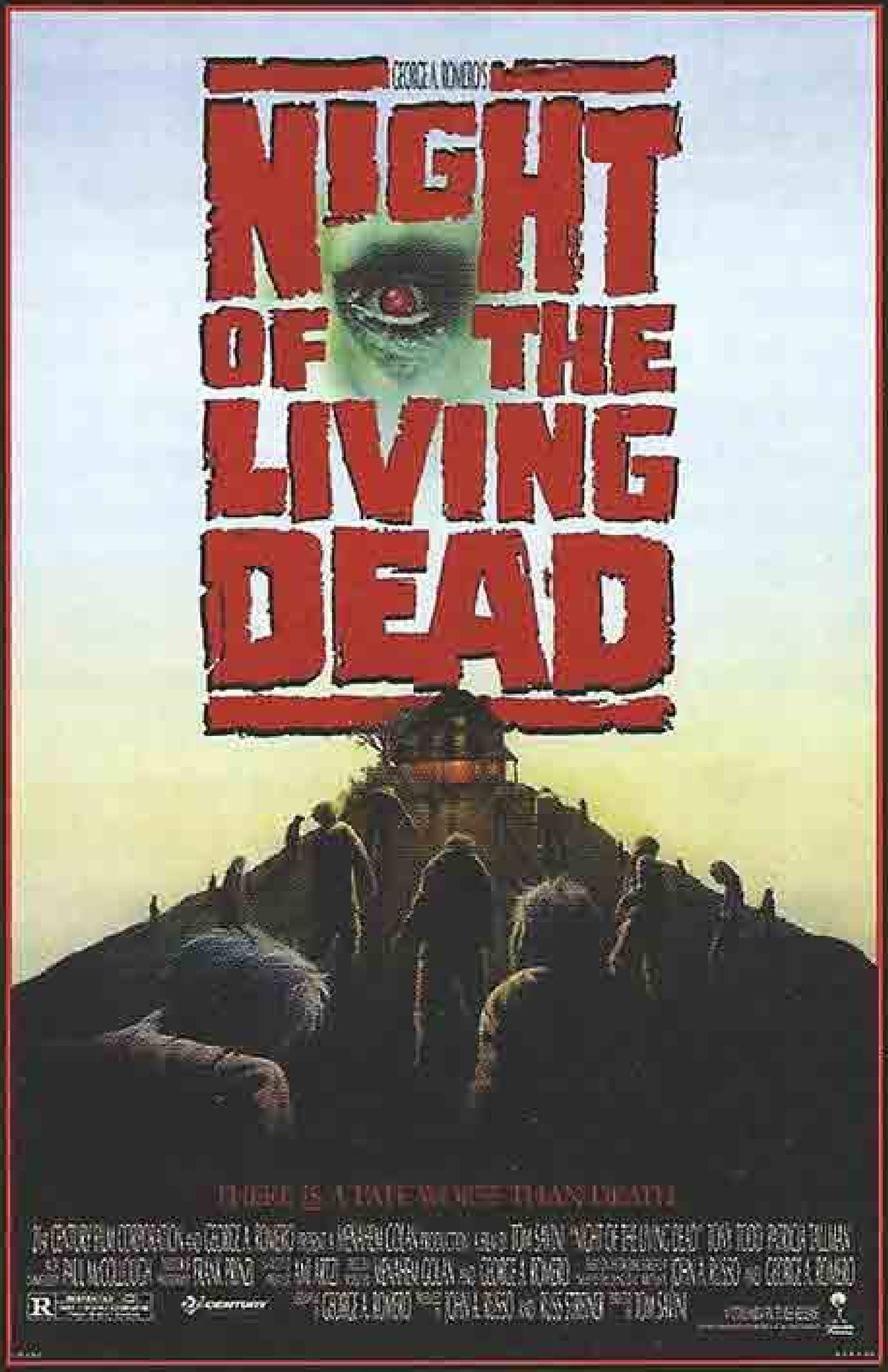
—Justin Beahm

The deceased Valdemar (Bingo O'Malley) is well-suited to put a chill into others.

LIVING DEAD
Redemption

Tom Savini looks back at the challenges of his directorial debut on the "Night of the Living Dead" remake.

By MICHAEL FELSHER


GEORGE A. ROMERO'S
NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD
THERE IS A FATE WORSE THAN DEATH

In 1994, I attended my first-ever horror convention in Durham, North Carolina. My chief reason for going: to meet Tom Savini, a headline guest at the show. I had admired his work for years, and this was a rare opportunity to meet a childhood hero. I had a copy of FANGORIA #97, whose cover was dedicated to Savini's underrated directorial debut: the 1990 remake of *Night of the Living Dead*. Upon meeting the man, I placed it in front of him and asked for an autograph.

Taking one look at the cover, Savini frowned and began signing his name while remarking, "Oh good, the worst experience of my life..." He handed the magazine back to me, and I left, somewhat deflated and upset. Did he not see that my enthusiasm for his film was genuine? Why was it the worst experience of his life? I had no answers, only questions.

Since that time, I've been fortunate enough to become friends with Savini through a variety of projects we've worked on together, and was happy to accept this assignment to interview him about *Night of the Living Dead.* I wanted to know what his take on the film was now, some 20-plus years since its release. I also wanted some closure on our initial meeting that nearly scarred me for life.

OK, I'm overstating that a bit, but still...I needed some answers.

FANGORIA: How did you end up taking on the challenge of directing the remake of one of the most influential horror films of all time?

TOM SAVINI: George Romero came to me and said, "Hey, we're going to do a remake of *Night of the Living Dead*, and I want you to direct it." My assumption was that they thought I did such a good job with the *Tales from the Darkside* episodes I directed, I would be the logical choice, and I'm sure George didn't want to direct it again. So I was the guy, and I think that caused a lot of tension among other people involved in the original movie who did not trust that I could do it, you know what I mean?

FANG: How close to the original film did you want yours to be, or did you have a desire to break away from those elements?

SAVINI: I wanted to do something visually exciting and different, and not just a frame-by-frame remake. In fact, George and I had a meeting, and I talked about having "zombie points of view" to create tension. Shoot them in black and white, so if you saw that, you knew you were seeing what the zombies were seeing. My mindset was, it was going to be very difficult to make zombies scary again, because there's only so much you can do with them. So I had a lot of ideas that didn't get into the movie because it was my first feature. I swallowed a lot of shit that I even regret today—that I didn't fight more for what I wanted back then.

Today, Tom Savini feels as affectionate toward his ghouls as he did when he first started the *Night* remake.

FANG: What other factors made the film so difficult?

SAVINI: Time was a serious constraint. When George came in and looked at all my storyboards, he said, "Great, you have a six-week movie here, but you only have four weeks to shoot it." My idea was to make it more visually exciting and different from the first movie, which is the whole reason why the first person in the graveyard other than Johnny and Barbara is not a zombie. If you've seen the original version, you think that's a zombie, then he's a mourner and moves on, and then the real zombie comes up. Those were gimmicks I put in there to change the retelling of that same story. And why can't we make Barbara a hero and come back and try to save the day? And George rewrote.

And this is the most important thing: I was in the middle of a divorce! My wife asked for a divorce a week into the shooting. My concentration was not on the movie, it was, "How can I keep my daughter?" I was in extreme mental turmoil. I mean, when it came time for lunch on the set, I would collapse into a dark room just to rest...just to think...just to have a break to try to solve my problems at home. It sounds like I'm blaming a lot of things, but if I were to say what was *my* blame, I would say maybe not enough preparation, or not standing up for what I wanted to do and demanding to be in charge.

FANG: It sounds like the perfect shitstorm hit you during this film.

Photos: Copyright Columbia

SAVINI: Exactly.

FANG: One of the most rumored aspects of this film over the years is the negative effect it supposedly had on your relationship with Romero, both personally and professionally. For the record, what *was* the impact?

SAVINI: We didn't work together on that film as much as we could have, because George was under deadline to write *The Dark Half,* his next movie. If George had been on the set, it would have been a wonderful experience. You know, I really wanted to impress George. I wanted to make him proud. I think he loved the storyboards.

But as far as my friendship with George…yes, there was a time when we stopped speaking. We stopped during the editing process. I was totally ignored, and really felt I had lost one of my best friends. But since then, there have been moments and we do a lot of conventions together. I was in *Land of the Dead*. So, certainly, hanging out together after *Night of the Living Dead* rekindled a friendship between us, though that bond when I was the effects guy is not there anymore. But a new friendship has begun.

> **"I wanted to do something visually exciting and different, and not just a frame-by-frame remake."**

FANG: Has anything in the past 20-plus years since *Night*'s release mellowed you in your stance toward the final product? Are you able to see, in any way, what its many fans find valuable and entertaining about it?

SAVINI: There was a midnight screening last year, I think, and they brought me in at 11:00 to do a Q&A. And that was great; the people were obviously fans. But I was not going to sit down and watch this movie that I hated so much again. My plan was to leave after the Q&A, but I sat there for a while, and surprisingly, it was the very first time I was able to see the film objectively as if I had nothing to do with it. And my impression was that it was good, really good. The suspense was there, the acting was terrific…

FANG: You had a fantastic cast, for sure.

SAVINI: It was a good movie. So my attitude toward it has changed. It's a good movie even though it's only 30 percent of what I intended, but I'm looking at it thinking of what it could have been. But the fans seem to enjoy it, because they're calling it one of the better remakes that's been done, so I don't know what else to say about that.

FANG: So, if some poor unsuspecting fanboy came up to you now with that same issue of FANGORIA, how would you react now as opposed to…let's say, 18 years ago?

SAVINI: [*Laughs*] I would react positively, because I like the film, I respect it. It is what it is. I wouldn't be so instantly offended…you know, that "piece of shit" kind of attitude. You were at the wrong place at the right time.

FANG: Or the wrong place at the wrong time?

SAVINI: Yeah. There are a lot of ways to say it.

FANG: What would be another way?

SAVINI: Tom Savini is an asshole [*laughs*].

You don't have to let 'em get *this* close before shooting 'em in the head…

The 1990 ghouls were as relentless as the remake trend is today.

Turning Barbara into a more proactive heroine was a (Patricia) Tallman order.

THE DARK HALF

DIVIDE AND HORRIFY

Thad (Timothy Hutton) and Liz Beaumont (Amy Madigan) only think they're burying his "past."

"They're us," says Peter (Ken Foree), succinctly summing up the question of zombie identity in *Dawn of the Dead*, and it's a statement that can be applied throughout George A. Romero's filmography. In practically all of his cinema, the "monsters" are not outside, unrelated threats, but alter/altered egos of the ordinary protagonists: the neighbors gone mad in *The Crazies*, the boy next door as vampire in *Martin*, the primate as the primal in *Monkey Shines*, the new "face" providing license for revenge in *Bruiser*. This concept of divided personality finds perhaps its most literal expression in *The Dark Half*, Romero's 1993 adaptation of Stephen King's 1989 novel.

Considering how inextricably the names of Romero and King have been tied together in the horror-fan consciousness, it's a surprise, and a disappointment, to note that this is one of only two films (the other being *Creepshow*) on which Romero directed the author's words, and the only instance where he adapted one of King's literary works. It wasn't for lack of trying; the director has been attached to numerous King-based projects over the years (most notably *The Stand* and *Pet Sematary*), but the vagaries of scheduling and producers have kiboshed all the others. It's a damn shame, since *Dark Half* proves Romero eminently capable of distilling one of the author's lengthy tomes into two-hour feature format, maintaining fidelity to the text while bringing his own cinematic point of view to the table.

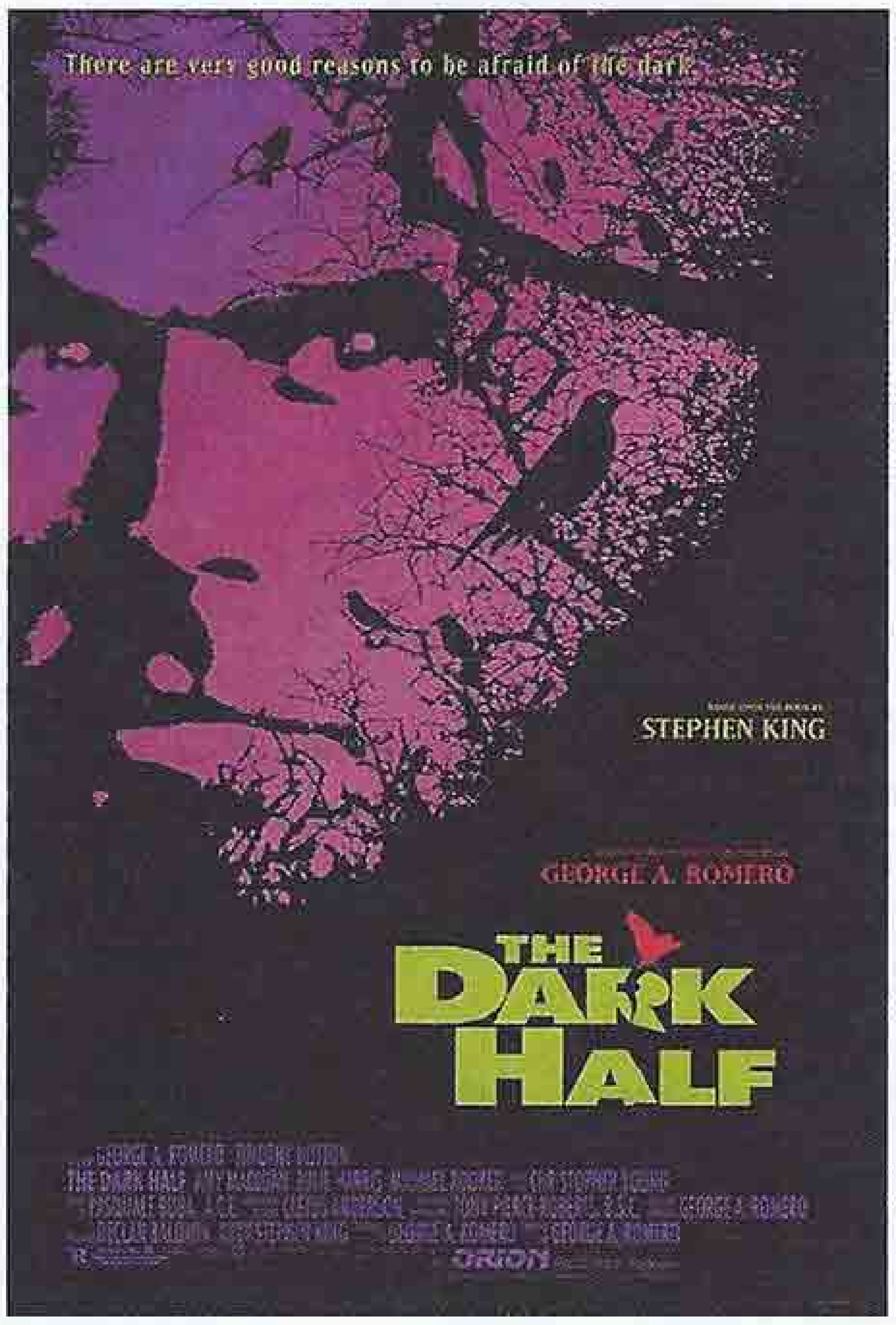
The story, of course, is based on King's utilization of the "Richard Bachman" pseudonym on a number of novels, and the outing of this *nom de plume* shortly after the publication of *Thinner*. The author's stand-in in *Dark Half* is Thad Beaumont (played by Timothy Hutton), a writer who, as a child, had a vestigial unborn twin surgically removed from his brain. He has grown up to become a writer of acclaimed but financially unrewarding books, and makes better money turning out violent best-selling thrillers under the name "George Stark." When a weasel named Fred Clawson (Robert Joy) discovers Thad's secret and tries to blackmail him, threatening to reveal his second identity, Thad beats him to the punch by arranging for a mock funeral in which he and his wife Liz (Amy Madigan) are photographed in front of "Stark's" tombstone for *People* magazine.

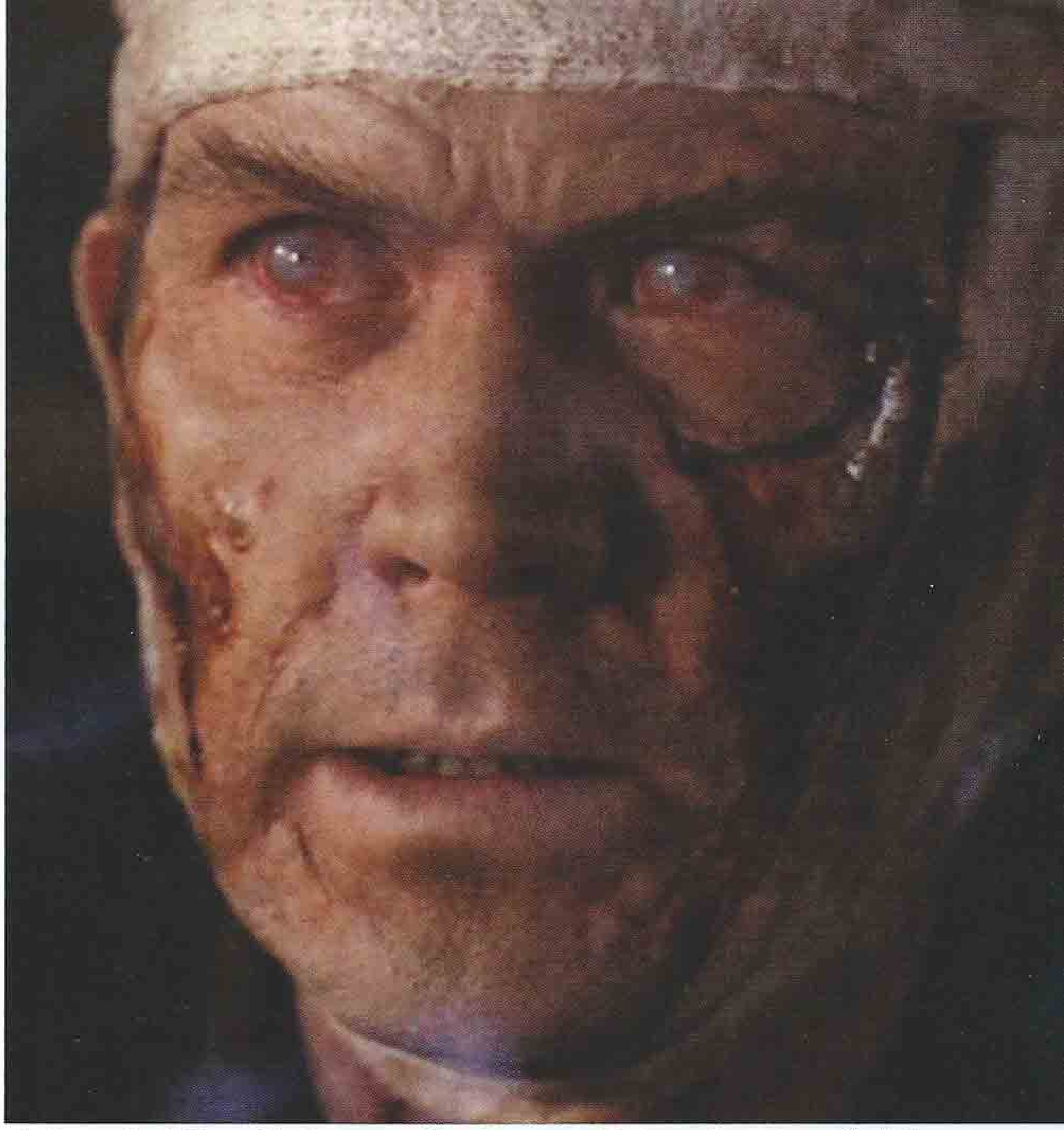
But you can't keep a bad-ass down, and after "Stark's" grave is found disturbed, with a series of footprints leading away, someone with Thad's fingerprints starts killing off those responsible for the pseudonym's "death," including Clawson and Thad's agent (Rutanya Alda). Eventually, Stark (also played by Hutton) makes himself known to Thad; physically deteriorating, he needs Thad to write a new Stark novel to keep him whole, and will threaten or kill anyone—including Thad's

GEORGE
STARK
1985-1991
NOT A VERY
NICE GUY

If only they knew...

Photos: Copyright Orion


There are very good reasons to be afraid of the dark.
STEPHEN KING
GEORGE A. ROMERO
THE DARK HALF
ORION



As George Stark (Hutton) begins to resemble a Romero zombie, he needs words, not flesh, for sustenance.

family—to get his way.

It's tempting to read *The Dark Half* as an example of King working out issues with his place as a genre writer and idol, coming as the novel did two years after *Misery*, in which another author is literally held hostage to a fan's demented enthusiasm. For his film version, Romero eschews this kind of analysis and instead continues his preoccupation from *Monkey Shines* with what can happen if one's dark side takes on its own identity and gets out of control. (In this sense, it coincidentally follows in the footsteps of the previous year's *Candyman*, also based on the work of a literary horror great—Clive Barker—and dealing with an invented figure who manifests and kills to reassert his own identity.) Romero's screenplay is a perfect condensation of King's book, retaining the important elements and events and jettisoning superfluous material, with a consistent attention to characterization and story logic.

The whole scenario wouldn't work without the right actor in the dual leading role, and Hutton does a terrific job bringing both Thad and Stark to life, eliciting sympathy for the beleaguered writer and lending his brutal doppelganger a palpable sense of menace. Romero gives the actor his due during the duo's climactic showdown; instead of tricking the film up with fancy FX of the two sharing screen space, he allows Hutton's performances to make the scenes work. In the supporting roles, the filmmaker employs offbeat choices that pay off. Reggie Delesseps, an associate and confidant at the college where Thad teaches who's written as a man on King's pages, is played by veteran actress Julie (*The Haunting*) Harris, a welcome presence who handles her required exposition with brio and the right touch of eccentricity. And in his first horror movie since breaking out with *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, Michael Rooker here has the good-guy role of Alan Pangborn, the local sheriff investigating Stark's crimes and another friend of Thad's, who hangs onto a presumption of the writer's innocence as long as he can in the face of mounting evidence that Thad is the guilty party.

All involved behave realistically in the face of the movie's horrors, which only serves to make them more potent. Though it's not as graphic as the films Romero made his name on, *The Dark Half* doesn't shy away from the grisliness of Stark's evil deeds, or at the climax, when the villain receives his comeuppance (a setpiece crafted in reshoots after the original, more spiritual conclusion, which followed King's more closely, was deemed too soft by preview audiences). Romero also sneaks in touches of his traditional black humor, as when Stark's claiming of a victim in an apartment-house hallway is interrupted by a tenant who opens his door to ask what's going on. "Murder," Stark replies. "Want some?"

Sadly, echoing the box-office disappointment of his previous feature *Monkey Shines*, the mass audience didn't want some. Distributor Orion Pictures did a more respectable job promoting this picture than they did with Romero's monkey movie, but it didn't catch on, and the filmmaker would go without helming a feature for the rest of the decade. But *The Dark Half* remains a best-case scenario for translating King's work to the big screen, and proof that Romero is capable of tackling mainstream material with the same skill he applies to his more personal, self-generated storylines.

—Michael Gingold

The pen isn't necessarily mightier than Stark's blade.

BRUISER

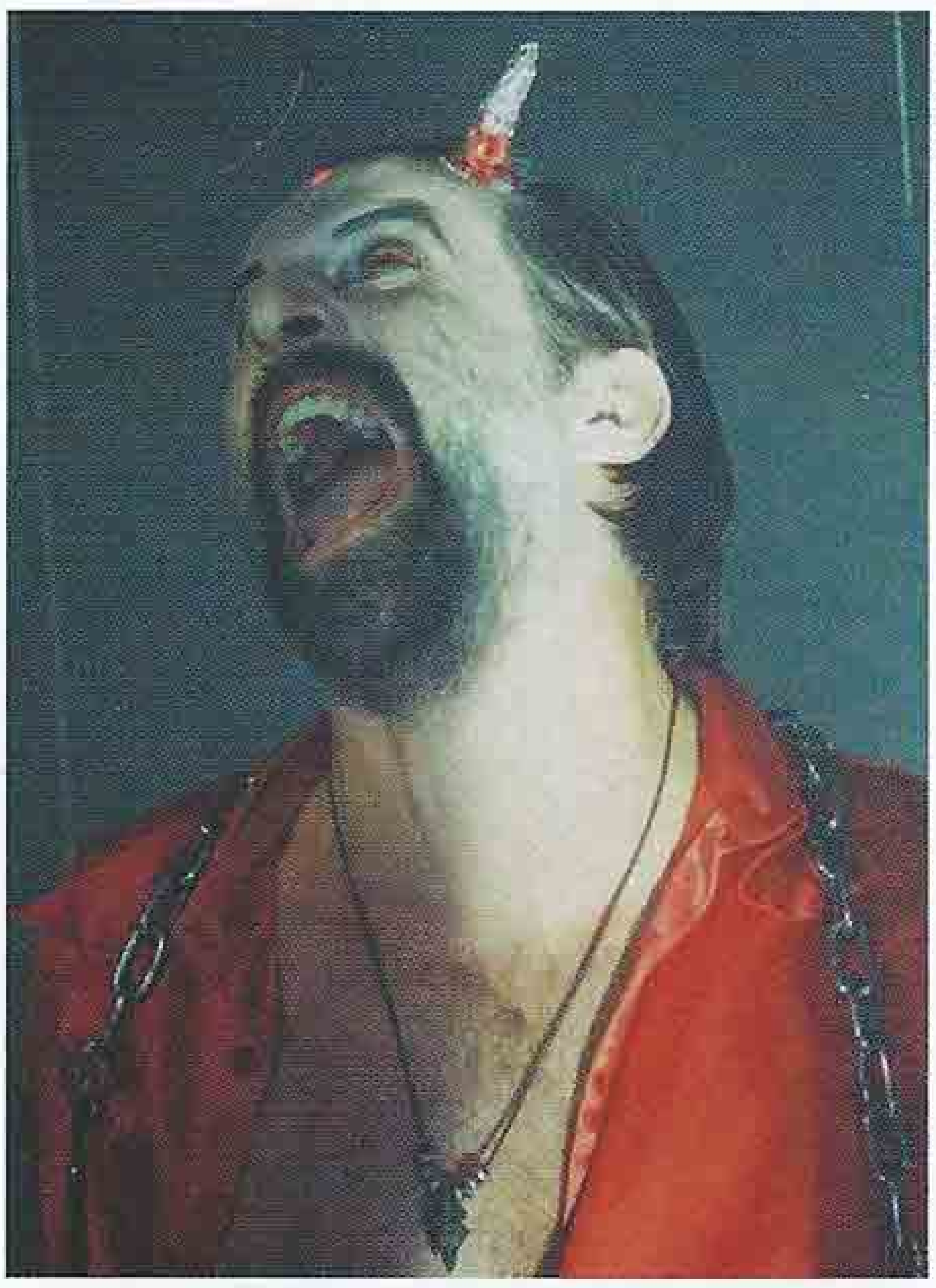
Trying on a different face

In *Bruiser*'s world, you have to lose your face to gain retribution.

Without a zombie or vampire anywhere in sight, George A. Romero's *Bruiser* may be his one film that completely fell off the map for most of his fan base. True, bypassing theatrical release in the U.S. and being released directly and unceremoniously to video probably didn't help its reputation, or make people want to run out and rent it. Which is sad since, despite some considerable flaws, there's a lot here to like, and it is most definitely a Romero film to the very core of its iconoclastic being—including its pitch-black sense of humor in the midst of another of the filmmaker's examinations of how a character tries (and fails) to maintain his humanity against all societal odds.

While this is probably not anybody's favorite Romero film, to write it off without exploring its place in the continuing development of the director's artistic expression is a mistake. This is a key stepping point in his career—the marker along the dotted line which tells us that he has finally left Pittsburgh behind and adopted a new homeland from which to work and create.

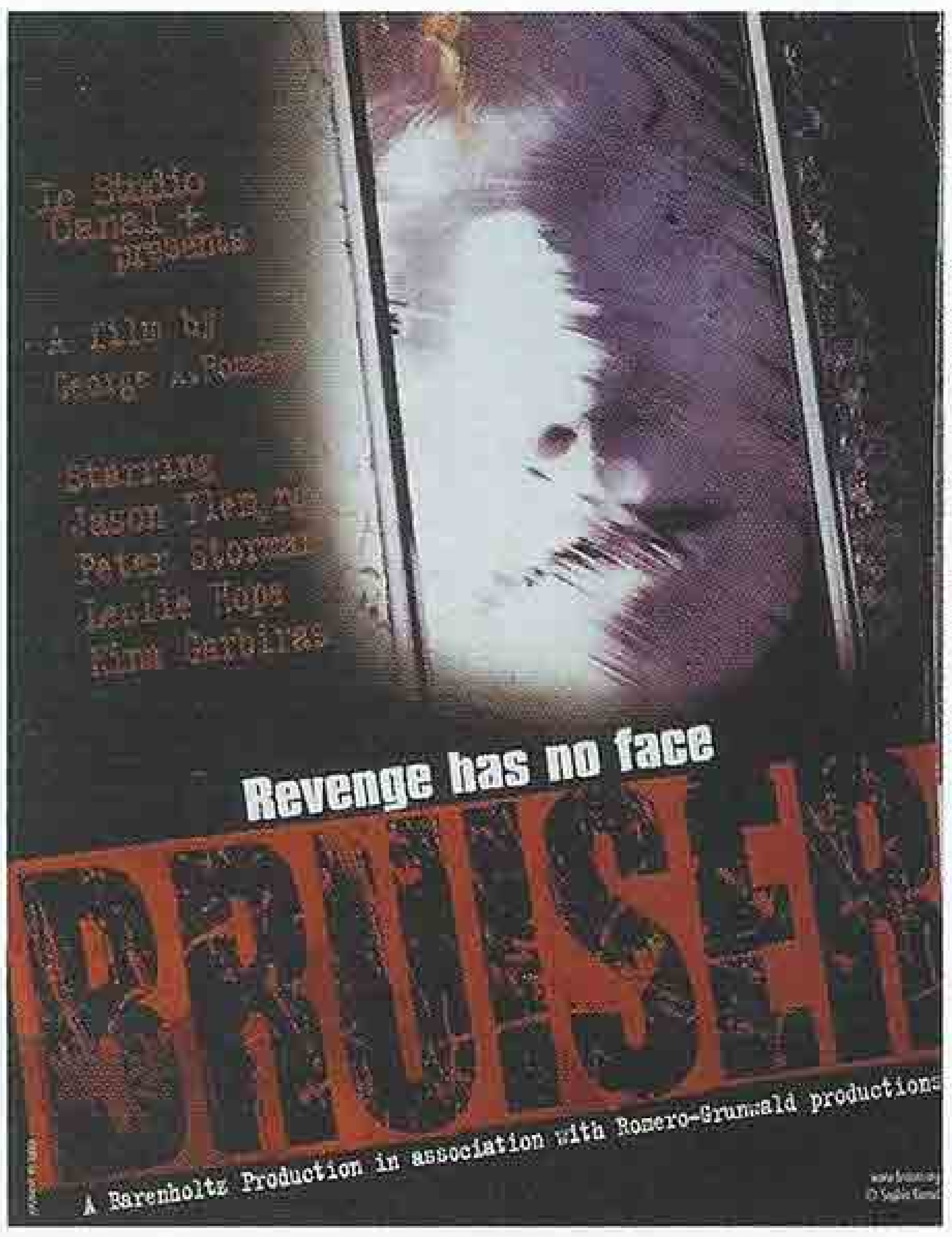
Specifically, this is his first Canadian-lensed production, and he has remained there as a resident and filmmaker ever since. It's the story of a man named Henry Creedlow (Jason Flemyng), who has been living in a half-finished home, never has the return on investment he thinks he should be receiving (due to his best friend's embezzlements), has a complete asshole (Peter Stormare) for a boss and stagnates in a contentious relationship with his unfaithful wife (Nina Garbiras)—and wakes up one morning with a blank mask where his face used to be. This seems like an apt metaphor for a director who abandoned his home country, separated from his wife and eventually found sufficient funds to finally make another movie after nearly a decade of spinning his wheels on high-profile projects that never ended up being made.



Photos: Copyright Trimark

Milo Styles (Peter Stormare) is one hell of a boss.

What makes *Bruiser* particularly uncomfortable viewing is that we as an audience identify with and want to support the lead character who has been continually browbeaten and taken advantage of by his boss, his best friend and his spouse. But once the revenge starts happening, it all comes across as a bit too brutal (and even arbitrary, when he accidentally kills the cleaning lady who's been stealing from him). Romero seems to be saying, "Hey, you wanted to see this poor schlub finally get some payback for


Le Studio Canal + presents
A film by George A. Romero
Starring Jason Flemyng Peter Stormare Leslie Hope Nina Garbiras
Revenge has no face
BRUISER
A Barenholtz Production in association with Romero-Grunwald productions

One can't help wondering how much of Henry Creedlow's (Jason Flemyng) rage reflects Romero's.

all the crap he's taken? OK, here you go!" And then, once the vengeance begins, we're reminded to be careful what we wish for.

The design of the blank mask Creedlow finds attached to his head is reminiscent of the classic visage in *Eyes Without a Face*—similarly lacking in any real detail, yet like a psychological Rorschach blot able to convey any number of emotional states through a blankness that invites the audience to supply expressivity to the protagonist's invisible features. What those expressions might actually be is dependent upon whether or not the viewer is amused or horrified by the actions he's taking. In the audio commentary on *Bruiser*'s DVD, Romero talks about how the mask was initially flesh-colored, but after a few days of shooting, the production took a hiatus, as the results were not satisfactory. This was a good choice, and Romero was lucky to have a smart producer like Peter Grunwald (who first worked with the director on *Monkey Shines* 12 years earlier) to back him up on this decision, as halting a production once it begins is no small matter.

Despite Romero's claims that shooting this film was a great and fun experience for him, there's something inconsolably angry about it—and not just in terms of plot or characterization. There was a six-year period between *The Dark Half* in 1993 and *Bruiser* finally being made (it premiered in 2000) where Romero did not direct a single feature film, after averaging a movie once every couple of years. The 1990s were definitely a decade that could have used more of his wicked commentary, but beyond that, one could imagine that as a director, Romero must have been as frustrated and felt as beleaguered as his protagonist does here. It's hard not to wonder if some of the violent lashing out at the people who have made Creedlow's life miserable was a reflection of the frustration his director was experiencing in his professional and personal life. All conjecture on the part of this writer, I hasten to add. But the fact that Romero refers to such a nasty movie as being so liberating, and fun to have made, makes one thankful for the fact that he has the medium of film to give himself an expressive outlet in which to vent his rage and passions far more constructively and entertainingly than *Bruiser*'s antihero.

Bruiser is like a buffet of favorite themes from past Romero films given an odd twist: the Greek-chorus radio talk show from *Martin;* the bifurcation of personality into two distinct aspects (one seemingly normal and calm, the other psychotically out of control) explored in *The Dark Half* and *Monkey Shines;* and the idea of self-identity as something that's earned—a form of artistic personality and individualism—explored in the anachronistic antics of the jousting bikers of *Knightriders*. But if the latter was about the strength of camaraderie, then *Bruiser* is a tale of the miserable little victories to be gained from a divide-and-conquer mentality.

Despite—or maybe because of—some of the very dark humor, this is the coldest and cruelest of Romero's cinema. It somehow lacks the attraction of many of his other works to demand repeat viewings for the sheer joy of watching it again. Is it because the put-upon main character is too uncomfortably close to the real life any one of us could be leading? There is no supernatural explanation for anything that happens in the *Bruiser* universe, so what we have here is a Kafkaesque horror film that plays like the feel-bad version of Sam Raimi's similarly antisocial *Darkman*, including an ending that invites a sequel too nasty to comfortably welcome back.

—Scooter McCrae

This time, Romero could reassure his cast (including Stormare and Nina Garbiras) that the movie is more about what's eating its protagonist than what's trying to eat them.

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HOME OF THE GRAVE

No zombie could be as rapacious as Kaufman (Dennis Hopper).

The year 2004 ended with two now-historic events. In October, after two years at war, the chief U.S. weapons inspector reported that there never were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, negating the reason the U.S. went to battle there in the first place. One month later, to the delight of political bookies everywhere and the utter confusion of most everyone else, George W. Bush, the man responsible for said Iraq war, was reelected as President of the United States. Bush had become the most polarizing president in decades; his 2000 win over Vice President Al Gore, a contest that came down to hand-counted ballots in Florida (where Bush's brother Jeb conveniently presided as governor), initiated four years of political unrest, deep party division and grassroots activism not seen since the '60s.

With distrust in government and the wealthy at an all-time high by the time ballots were cast in 2004, the timing was perfect for the King of the Undead and purveyor of political genre commentary, George A. Romero, to return to the subgenre he created.

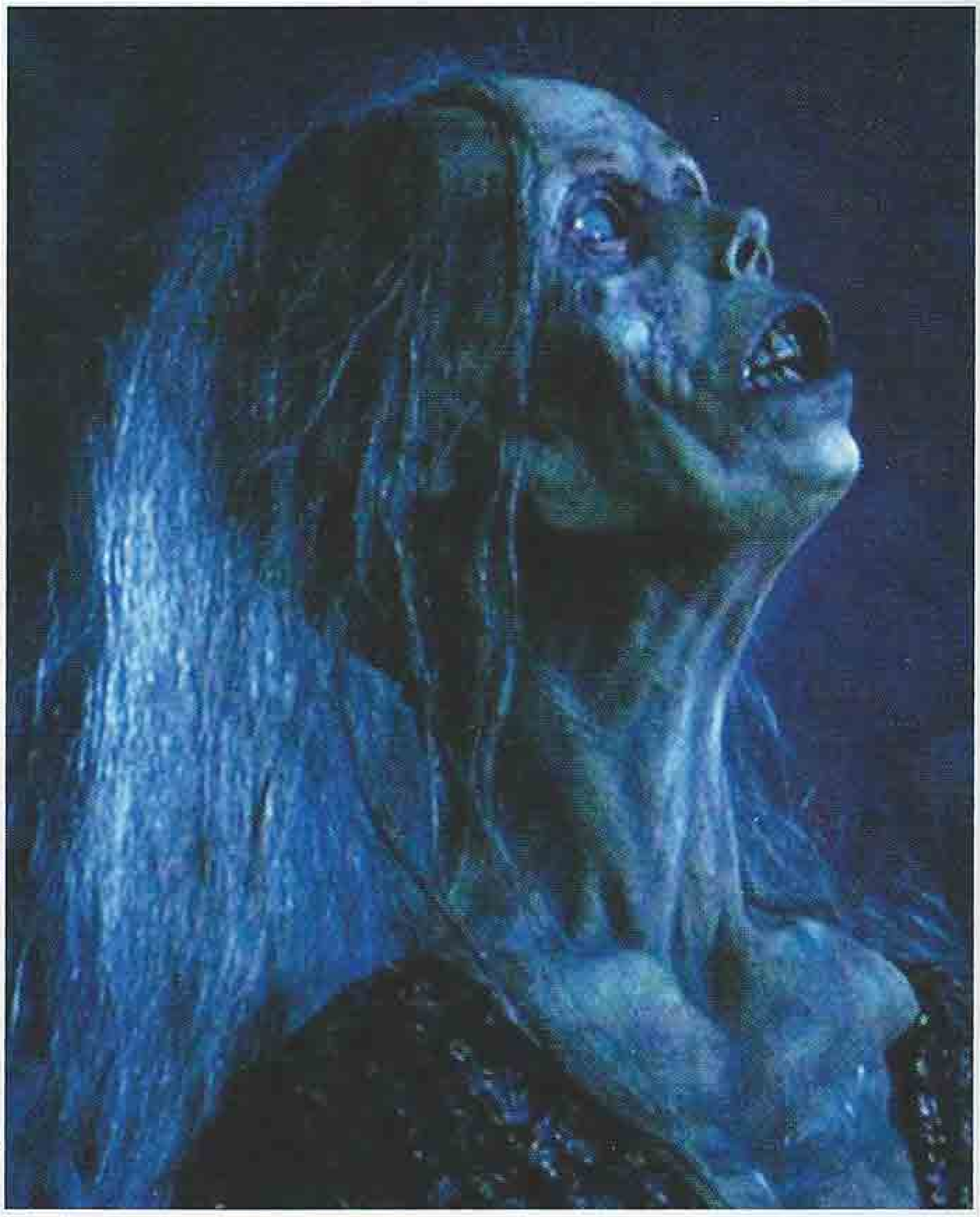
In the 20 years since *Day of the Dead*'s release in 1985, much had changed in horror, and Romero was making an effort to reinvent his own cinema along with the evolving genre. Aside from his one excursion into zombie territory with 1990's *Two Evil Eyes*, Romero had been intentionally navigating new waters with *Monkey Shines*, *The Dark Half*, *Bruiser*, his anthology television series *Tales from the Darkside* and its big-screen spinoff. Talk of another *Dead* film persisted, and the truth was that Romero had more story to tell after *Day* ended up being half-realized due to budget constraints. And then Bush happened… prompting the director to consider a more expansive approach to his ghouls, and take the politics in his art from subtle to overt.

Romero has always involved social commentary in his pictures, but with this newest effort, first titled *Dead Reckoning*, he took direct aim at the then-current Commander in Chief and his cronies. The film, not intended as a direct sequel to any of the preceding films in the *Dead* cycle, takes place in an unnamed city modeled after Romero's hometown of Pittsburgh, bordered by water on two sides and an electric fence on the other, intended to protect inhabitants from the zombies massing outside. In the city, the wealth is concentrated within a towering skyscraper known as Fiddler's Green, where the rich live an insulated life of ignorant bliss, enjoying indulgent lifestyles while the streets below teem with the poor, living in squalor. Atop it all sits sleazy Kaufman (Dennis Hopper, who molded the character out of a blend of Bush and his controversial defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld), ruling over the city with a bloodstained, money-grubbing fist.

At the center of the story is "Dead Reckoning," a massive armored vehicle under the control of Kaufman and his goon squad. Designed by good guy Riley Denbo (Simon Baker), recently retired from service to the evil empire, Dead Reckoning is a heavily armed security vehicle used to penetrate the wasteland when supplies within the city run low. Adding a new twist to zombie lore, the truck/tank is also equipped with firework-launching cannons, used to light up the sky and distract the undead whenever its occupants need to make a trip outside its confines. Things get hairy when Cholo (John Leguizamo), one of Kaufman's hitman scavengers, goes AWOL and steals the vehicle in an effort to land a handsome ransom, and Denbo is called in to track down his creation against his will.

In this new world, the undead are as abused as they are feared, used for the amusement of the rabble who delight in wrapping the hungry corpses in targets for rifle practice, and chaining them up to fight in cages like animals. Taking an evolutionary cue from *Day*'s intelligent Bub, the flesheaters—or "stenches," as they are referred to this time around—now not only have ways to communicate with each other, but band together to revolt against the oppressive humans, rallying behind an accidental "leader" named Big Daddy (Eugene Clark) and even figuring out how to use weapons. Denbo's crew come face to face with the dead in revolt in this multilayered story, full of social context and a complete lack of subtlety when it comes to the underlying moral thread. The film also stars Asia (*Trauma*) Argento and *Dark Half*'s Robert Joy, and features the FX handiwork of Greg Nicotero and Howard Berger.

Not only does *Land* offer up a more intelligent dead and sharp political satire, but it is arguably Romero's most visually stunning film. The blue hue over most of the picture is punctuated with colorful blasts of fireworks, shocks of viscera, blood and fire and an unforgettable underwater undead-army sequence that lingers as the movie's signature moment.

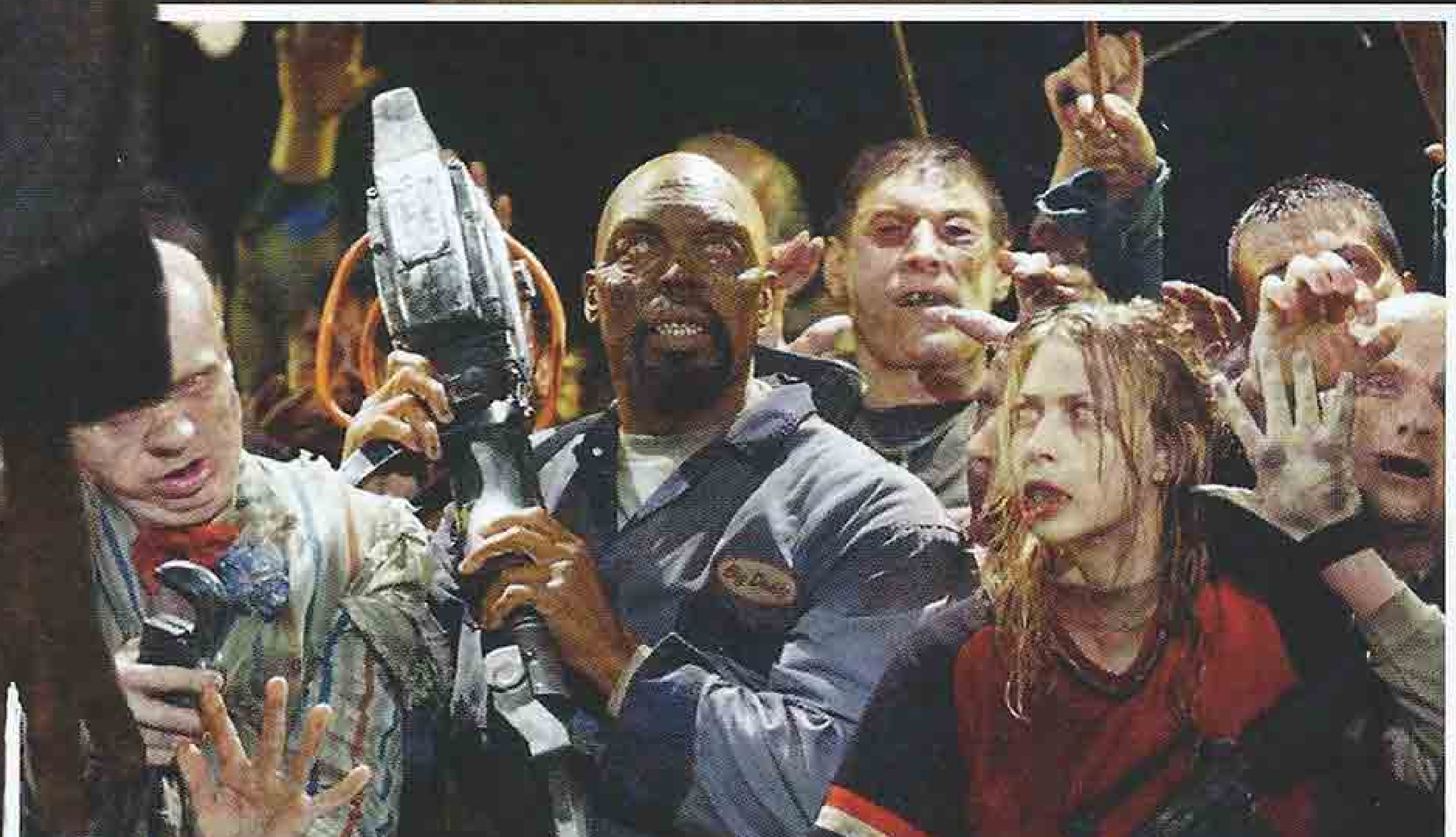


Everyone was feeling blue over the political situation in the mid-'00s.

Romero explained *Land*'s concept and unabashed political undercurrent to Fango in 2005 as "the idea of building a society on glass, and not caring what's going on around you—wearing blinders. I tried to relate to the post-9/11 head in America, living with terrorism. I guess you could call the central characters and the city, 'Bush America.' Ignoring the problem. Or maybe not ignoring it, but living around it, and profiting from it."

Where ghouls stumble hungry in *Night*, find focus in *Dawn* and awareness in *Day*, here we see them finally overthrow the establishment of the living, taking root inside man's domain and even clearing the way for the less fortunate in the land of the breathing. No longer patient with clumsy human characters who struggle to figure out what's right, in *Land*, Romero finds salvation for the world in the cold, dead hands of his precious dead, and reminds us that ego and wealth will always be bested by the natural good within us—before or after our demises.

—*Justin Beahm*

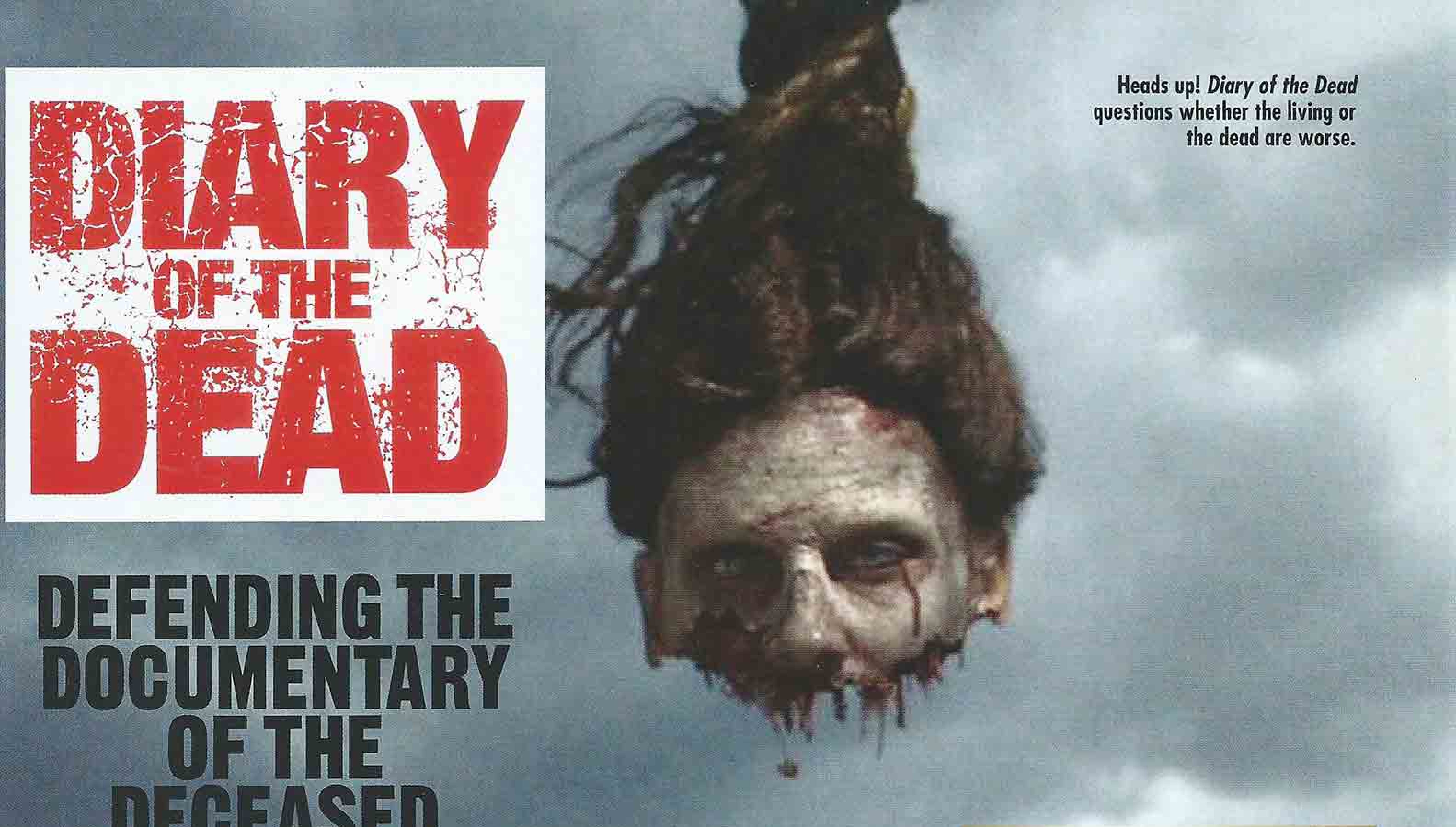


The *Land of the Dead* ain't big enough for the living.

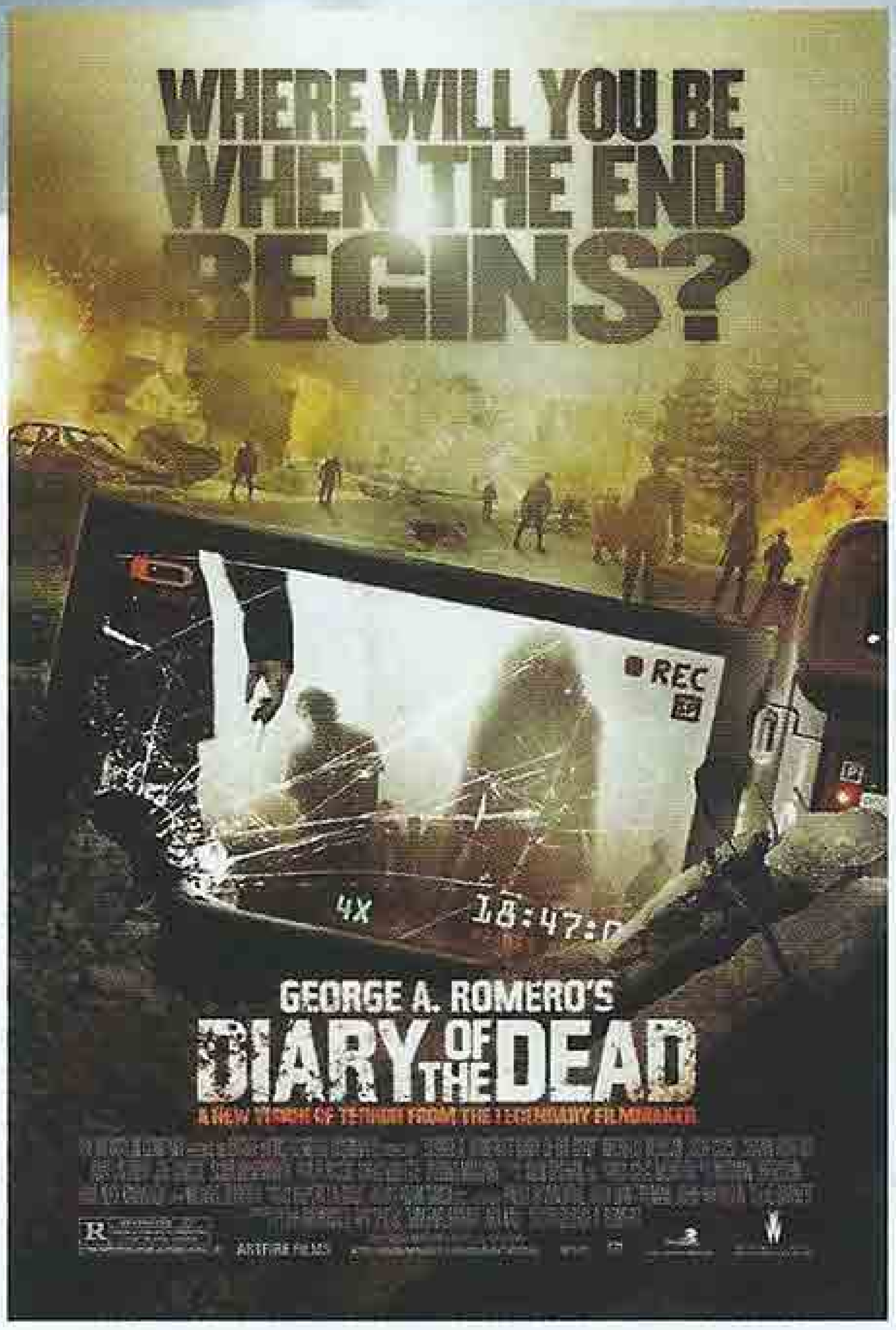
Photos: Copyright Universal

DIARY OF THE DEAD

DEFENDING THE DOCUMENTARY OF THE DECEASED



Heads up! *Diary of the Dead* questions whether the living or the dead are worse.


WHERE WILL YOU BE WHEN THE END BEGINS?
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GEORGE A. ROMERO'S
DIARY OF THE DEAD
A NEW VISION OF TERROR FROM THE LEGENDARY FILMMAKER

It's tempting to argue that George A. Romero's zombie movies suffer from the law of diminishing returns. His first trilogy, comprised of *Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead*, shot in and around Pittsburgh, is far superior to his second, looser trilogy, comprised of *Land of the Dead*, *Diary of the Dead* and *Survival of the Dead*, shot in and around Toronto (although all still set in Pennsylvania, the Transylvania of zombie lore), with the director in self-imposed exile. (Romero moved to Toronto and eventually took up dual U.S./Canadian citizenship in 2009.)

Night and *Dawn* are undoubtedly masterpieces; one could quibble over which one is the greater piece of cinema. They're both better than *Day* (purportedly the director's own favorite), which in turn is superior to *Land*, even though Romero included some of the ideas originally intended for *Day* in that movie. *Day* and *Land* are both better than *Diary*, and *Survival* is unquestionably the weakest link, particularly when it digresses into *Knightriders* territory. But even lesser Romero is often more interesting and entertaining than your average zombie film, and *Diary of the Dead* proves no exception. So let's dig in.

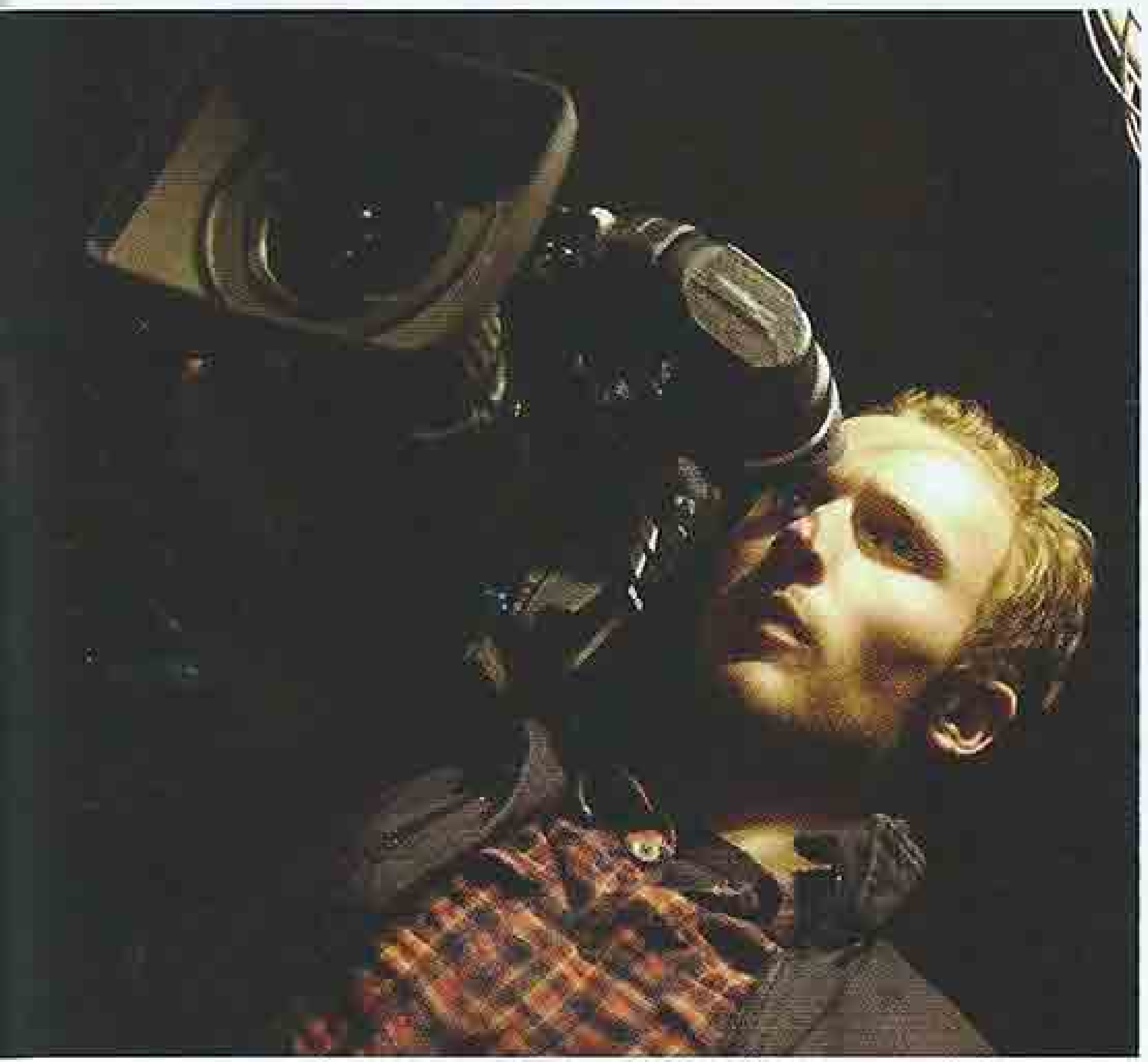
By the end of *Diary*, the real question becomes whether the living are worth saving.

The most intriguing aspect of *Diary* is that it's essentially a film about filmmaking, which allows the director to proffer a number of pronouncements and philosophical statements about both his own identity as a director and the function and purpose of horror and gore in general. It's a meditation on why people are transfixed by the recording and viewing of images of extreme violence and torture (the film includes montages of media coverage of war and brutal conflict), and it even questions the director's own culpability in perpetuating such imagery in an age when the overdetermined media is hungry for sensationalistic and often barbaric product. What often elevates Romero's films above the average whack-a-zombie mold is his political consciousness (his work is always primarily allegorical) and his ambivalence toward his own obvious pleasure in pure guts-and-glory gore.

That ambivalence is a signpost of his ultimate humanity, a quality grossly lacking in a majority of the torture-porn wave. It's true that Romero revels in the primal gross-out moments, constantly engaging himself in a game of grisly one-upmanship (the zombie eyeballs exploded by a defibrillator and the brain eaten away by acid are standouts in *Diary*). But there always has to be a purpose behind the splatter, a superego tempering his id. In other words, Romero has a conscience, a revolutionary approach to the contemporary horror movie.

Diary's narrative structure ingeniously accommodates all of the director's habitual themes and tropes. The movie opens with footage that we soon discover has been taken by a news cameraman who later surreptitiously uploads it to the Internet, a device that introduces us to the meta-narrative driving the story. It shows two dead bodies being removed from a building that become reanimated as zombies and kill both the paramedics and a few members of the media, including an annoying female news personality, covering the event. (Romero consistently identifies the mass media as an agency complicit with the corruption of contemporary society, and often wreaks revenge upon it.)

We are told that the two zombies were illegal immigrants, immediately drawing a parallel between disenfranchised minorities and the undead, a theme first introduced at the end of *Night* when the black lone survivor is misidentified as "one of them" and casually executed by the cracker cops. This theme is later elaborated on in *Diary* when a radio announcer says, "We become hysterical about people crossing the border into our country, but that's not the problem anymore. The problem now is all those creatures crossing the border between life and death." Romero explicitly relates xenophobia and paranoia about the invasion of foreigners to the undead phenomenon, identifying them as a monstrous fear of the other, and a kind of existential threat that comes from within.



For Jason Creed (Josh Close), the camera is a buffer between himself and the horrors of the real world.

How's this for meta—Greg Nicotero goes from making zombies to becoming one!

This is the crux of Romero's ambivalence toward his subject: Zombies may be the worst nightmare of the living, an expression of the dark side of human nature, but becoming one is also in a sense the ultimate form of democracy, where all distinctions of class and race are erased. That may explain why, as the director's mythology develops, the ghouls become increasingly radicalized (in *Land*, they are a homeless underclass that rises up against the privileged, corporate world of the living) and humanized (Bub, the domesticated zombie in *Day*, develops human characteristics; the creatures in *Survival* start to become almost indistinguishable from the living in their habits and behavior). The zombies also become slightly more sympathetic, while the living are increasingly vilified—to the point where, by the end of *Diary*, the real question becomes whether the living are worth saving.

After the opening scene, we are introduced to the story's main conceit: the making of a film called *The Death of Death*. We discover that grad student Jason Creed (played by Josh Close, his character's name itself invoking an almost religious attachment to cinema), although primarily a documentarian, is making his University of Pittsburgh thesis project a horror movie whose monster is a mummy (a prototype of the modern zombie). This film-within-the-film, referred to by one of the other students as "a stupid f**king mummy movie," also has, as a pretentious film professor points out, "an underlying threat of social satire." Indeed, it ends up becoming the meta-film that comprises *Diary*'s narrative—part student film, part narrative, part documentary, part self-parody, part viral video and part social critique.

When a real zombie outbreak occurs while they're shooting a scene in which the mummy chases a helpless female, the student filmmaker hijacks his own movie to document the apocalyptic event. This clever device gives Romero all sorts of room to comment on his own work, either frivolously or more philosophically. On the lighter side, Jason directs the actor playing the mummy, "You're a corpse, for Christ's sake. If you run fast, your ankles are going to snap off," making a case for the "slow zombies" which Romero pioneered.

More profoundly, Jason's girlfriend Debra (Michelle Morgan) repeatedly rebukes him for relentlessly recording everything that happens, no matter how hideous and disturbing, to the point where the line between documentation and exploitation becomes blurred. "If it didn't happen on camera, it's as if it didn't happen," she says, accusing him of valuing cinema over real life, a dilemma that most serious filmmakers have to confront at some point in their careers. In terms of exploitation, Debra also questions whether Jason is really uploading his magnum opus to the Internet as a kind of public service, to warn people of the undead threat and show them how to survive, or if he's more interested in fame and how many hits his viral video gets (on MySpace!—part of the horror is how quickly films referencing technology can become dated these days).

Hungry for some *vérité* allegory? *Diary* will fill you up.

It is Debra, in fact, who's the film's main point of identification: She is the narrator, the Final Girl who finishes the film and releases it to the public for her boyfriend after he and most of the cast and crew succumb to the zombies. If, that is, as the leader of the group of African-American men who stay behind to fight the ghouls points out, there's anyone left to watch it. It's classic Romero to have female and black characters front and center, fighting and surviving the attack. Women are not often helpless victims in Romero's films (not since Barbra in *Night*, anyway), as he parodies in Jason's mummy movie, and black people aren't the first to die, as the cliché goes in so many horror movies. As this group's leader, who expresses solidarity with Debra, the strong female lead, succinctly puts it, "For the first time in our lives, we got the power." Sure, it's a little corny, but it's the spirit of supporting the underdog and the oppressed that admirably runs through all Romero's work. It also once again reinforces his central ambivalence to the zombie outbreak, which in this case democratizes the corrupt dominant order by leveling the playing field and giving minorities the opportunity to share the power.

Romero's movies always offer a subversive critique of cultural institutions and authority figures that we may take for granted. In *Diary*, the police and members of the media are some of the first living beings to turn into zombies, and the National Guard has quickly transformed into cutthroat mercenaries, robbing the fleeing film crew of their meager supplies. The nuclear family is also a favorite target of Romero; as in *Night*, parents and small children become particularly nasty ghouls, turning and feeding on each other in some of the most grotesque scenes—a nightmarish twist on Freud's concept of "family romance."

At the end of *Diary*, the actor who plays the mummy in *The Death of Death* inevitably turns into a real monster, a zombie who finishes off the remainder of the film crew. ("I told you dead things move slow," Jason says when he sees the true incarnation of his creature.) But soon even the director himself is bitten, and he implores his girlfriend to shoot him, with both a gun and the camera, becoming the star and victim of his own snuff film. Only the professor, one student and Debra are left alive, trapped in a panic room with no chance of survival. The very end of the film, and of the film-within-the-film, shows gruesome footage of "hometown Joes" (reminiscent of the redneck cops who kill Ben at the end of *Night*) using zombies for target practice: the lower half of a suspended female ghoul is literally blown away with a shotgun. Speaking of the human race, Debra asks, "Are we worth saving? You tell me." Romero pointedly uses the mutilation of the nude female body not as a kind of twisted sexual thrill, as in so many torture-porn movies, but as a symbol of humanity's ultimate depravity. This is what sets Romero's films apart.

Ultimately, *Diary* doesn't aspire to the visionary profundity of *Night* and *Dawn*, partly because it's more tongue-in-cheek, bordering on self-parody. It doesn't have the expansive and ambitious scope of *Dawn*, *Day* and *Land*, films that offer a broader critique of consumerist culture, commercialism and corporatism, and even the military/industrial complex. But *Diary of the Dead* stands out as perhaps the most personal and self-reflexive treatise on zombies by the master, and for that it should be praised, not buried.

—Bruce LaBruce

Romero had previously trapped his characters in single locations, but in *Diary*, he let them hit the road.

Photos: Copyright Dimension

SURVIVAL OF THE DEAD

AN INSIDE (AND SOMETIMES OUTSIDE) LOOK

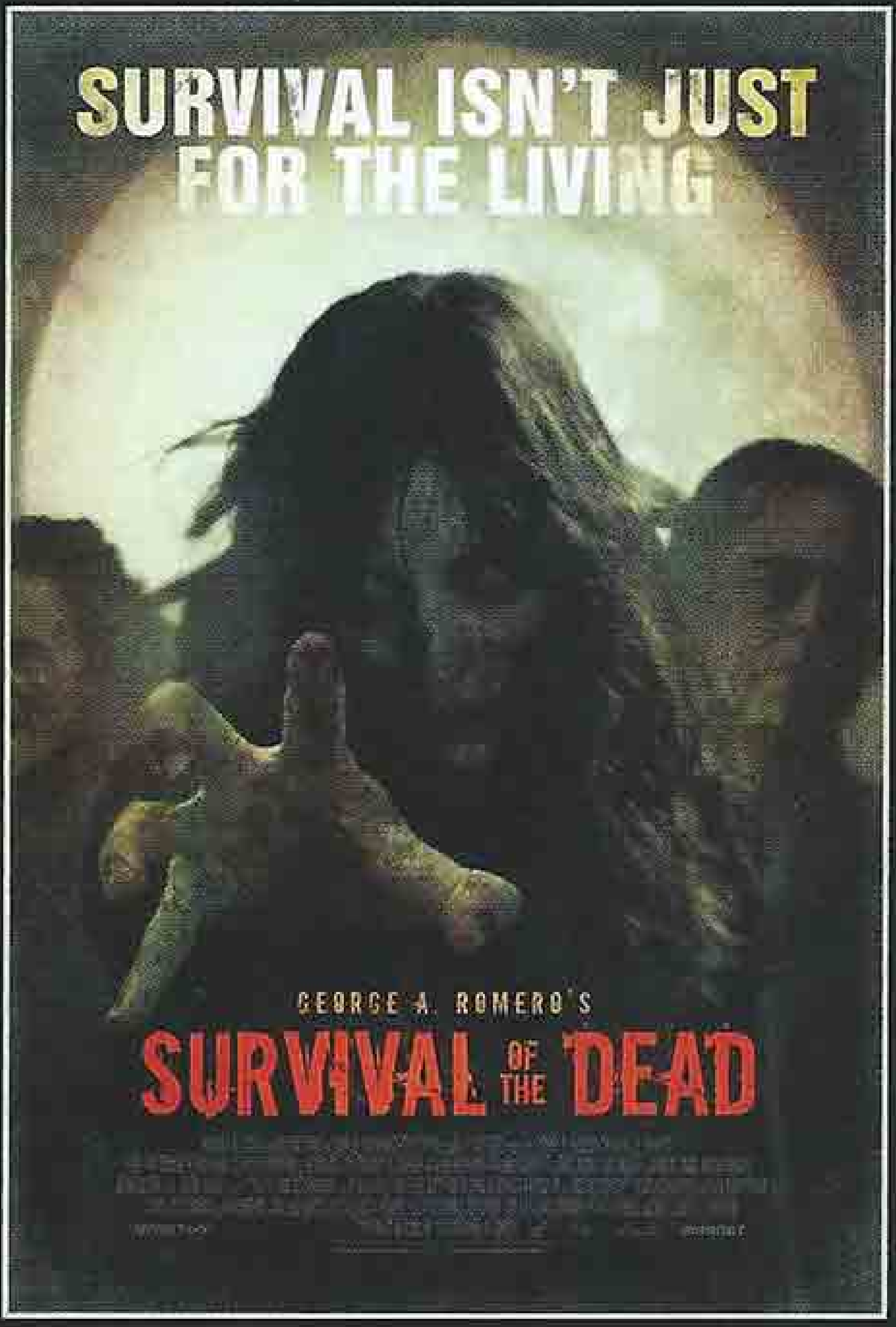
I've started and stopped the writing of this article about five times now. Finding a way to discuss George A. Romero's *Survival of the Dead* has proven challenging for a variety of reasons—few having anything to do with the film itself. Full disclosure: I worked on this movie as the EPK producer, which had me on set for the entirety of principal photography, supervising the shooting of all the behind-the-scenes material and cast/crew interviews, a lot of which were corralled into the *Walking After Midnight* documentary on *Survival*'s DVD and Blu-ray editions.

I'm not telling you this to impress you, or strut around like some fanboy-gone-pro, but in the hope it will illuminate my central problem in trying to discuss *Survival of the Dead.* While being close to Romero and co. gave me a unique insight into its creation, it also prevents me from being 100 percent objective about the final film. In the end, though, I doubt any writer could offer the sort of definitive statement on Romero's most recent picture that can be afforded his past classics. There just hasn't been enough time; as of this writing, *Survival* hasn't had the benefit of years of exposure to help place it in context amongst Romero's canon. The reaction upon its release was decidedly mixed: Some found its over-the-top characters and cartoonish situations a welcome change-up, while others took issue with *Survival*'s comic tone and found it lacking in energy.

Survival of the Dead is, admittedly, a hard film to peg in many ways. It was clearly Romero's intention to meld his *Dead* universe with the trappings of a classic Western, specifically the Gregory Peck epic *The Big Country.* Set on Plum Island, just off the coast of Delaware, the movie's primary conflict is between two warring families—one determined to keep their dead alive, in hopes that a cure can be found, the other seeing no benefit in keeping them around to potentially harm the remaining living, preferring to end their misery with a few well-placed bullets. This clever variation on the ol' Hatfields-vs.-McCoys feud is classic Romero; using tropes of the earliest storytelling traditions, he updates them for the modern world to demonstrate how little has truly changed regarding how people treat one another.

Survival also brings back another favorite Romero obsession: the military. Its initial protagonists are a group of disenfranchised National Guardsmen who have abandoned that role and are on the road, looking out for their own interests. Led by the troubled Sarge (Alan Van Sprang, playing a character briefly introduced in *Diary*), this group is our window into a world collapsing around them. While there is clearly a sense of depression and anger at what has become of their universe, these men (and one woman) function as a makeshift family—until the chaos on Plum Island causes them to re-evaluate their isolationist approach to this world.

I was struck by how many fans (and critics) found little or no substance in *Survival of the Dead.* No matter what your opinion of the final product, this is not a simplistic film; Romero wanted to explore society's obsession with war and conflict, especially the way we're unable to let go of past grievances, even under circumstances that would demand we do so for the sake of our very lives. *Survival* may be the director's most playful movie since he wandered the Monroeville Mall's corridors back in the late 1970s, but like *Dawn*, it wears its ideas and themes on its sleeve proudly and without apology.



And yet, I would be lying if I said the film was perfect. My issues stem less from what it is than from what it could have been. I remember how badly the largely exterior shoot was plagued by endless weather-related issues; the production was beset with rain, sleet, snow and below-freezing temperatures almost every day of the four-week schedule. As a result, Romero had to consistently adjust his ambitions, and although the crew brought their A game at every moment, there were inevitable compromises. And while *Survival* was more robustly budgeted than *Diary*, I can't help but wonder what a few extra dollars and another week of shooting would have meant to the movie.

In the end, my most significant problem with *Survival* is actually something of a backhanded compliment: I wanted more. It clocks in under 90 minutes, and while I'm all for storytelling economy, I always enjoy every minute I spend in Romero's universe. I could have easily handled more time with the Muldoon and O'Flynn clans, and perhaps gotten to know them a little better. *Survival* contains some of the most entertaining performances Romero has gotten since *Creepshow*, plus superb widescreen photography by Adam Swica and stellar contributions from many regular collaborators.

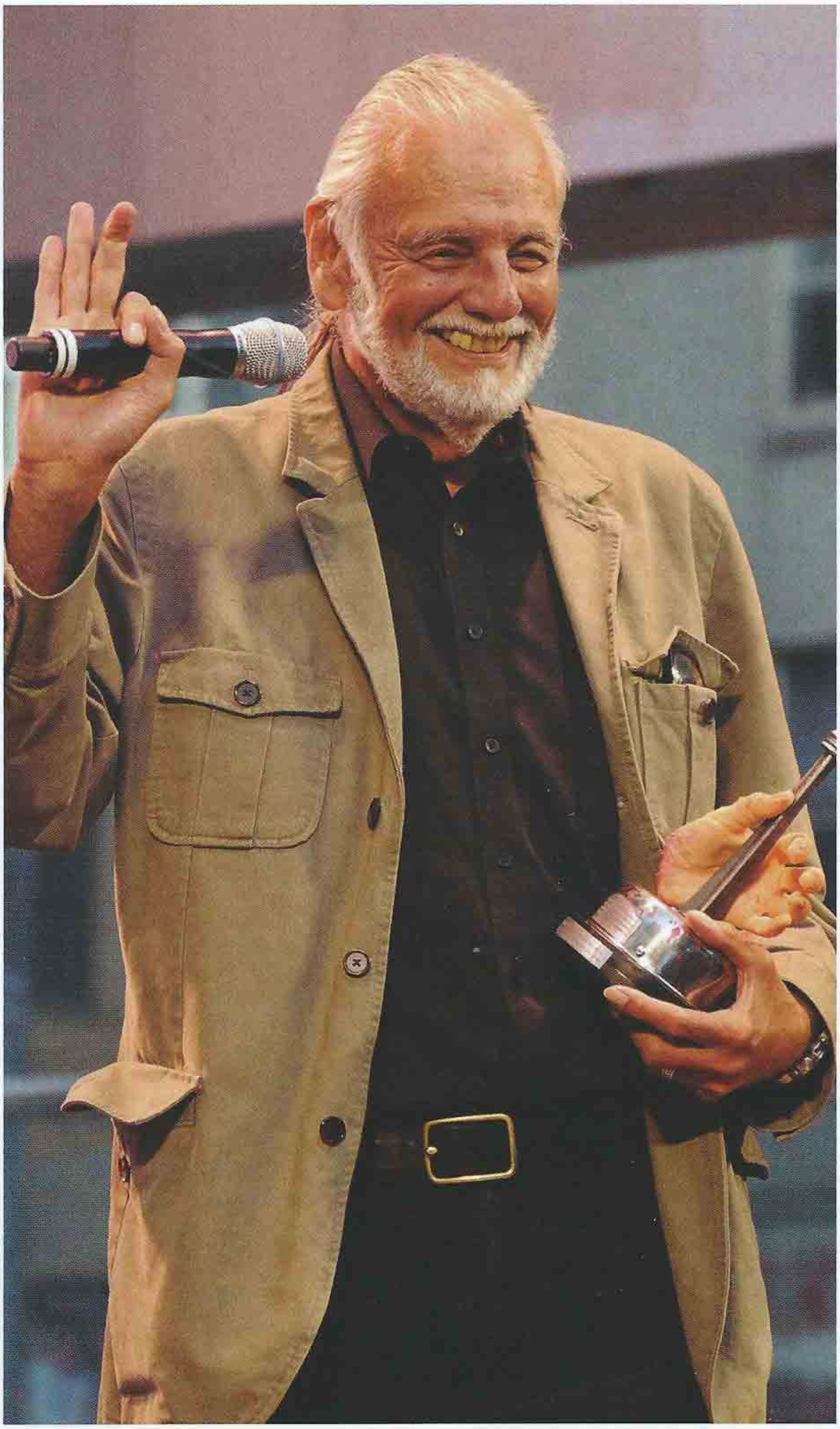
Survival of the Dead deserves to be debated, talked about and re-evaluated in the years to come—but for now, I await Mr. Romero's next cinematic odyssey, and wonder what delightful (or horrible) sights and sounds he has in store.

—Michael Felsher

Photo: Copyright Magnolia

Here's hoping this isn't the last we've seen of the director's hungry hordes...

THE WALKING DEADICATED



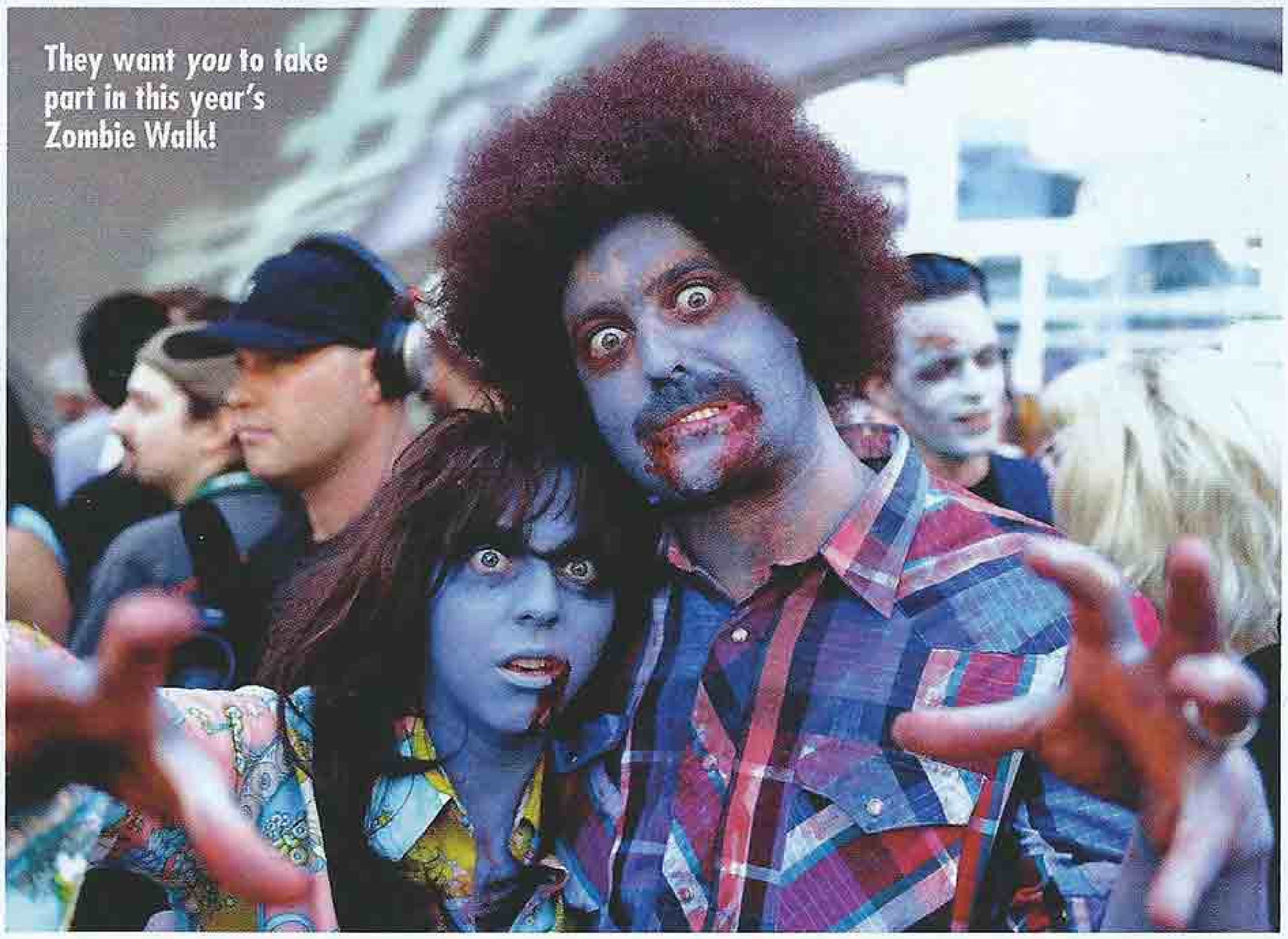
The city of Toronto really gave George A. Romero a hand in 2009.

It was with the walking corpses of *Night of the Living Dead* that I first saw home. Here was a group of monsters not battling each other, but walking the night together in search of human flesh. A chill ran down my 11-year-old spine, but from that point onward, the only things walking across my grave were zombies.

George A. Romero became a huge part of my ensuing horror obsession. My choice of favorite undead movie was in constant flux between *Night*, *Dawn* and *Day of the Dead*, as I would repeatedly study each one of them. After moving to Toronto, I met many others with the same obsession—but to my surprise, it was a rare few who actually wanted to don the attire of the dead. In 2003, I put up fliers for the Toronto Zombie Walk—and six people showed up.

Over the years, however, the Walk's numbers grew to pandemic proportions, and Romero started filming more *...of the Dead* films in Canada. The Toronto Zombie Walk crossed paths with the director a few times, including at the *Diary of the Dead* premiere during Midnight Madness at the city's International Film Festival.

Fans like Thea Munster (below) wear their love of zombie cinema on their sleeves and everywhere else.



They want *you* to take part in this year's Zombie Walk!

Coming back from the grave apparently doesn't correct vision problems.

Some folks would kill for a ticket to this event.

Fifty zombies lurched across a red carpet with Romero. At the time, we thought that was the thrill of our entire undead existence, but there was more to come.

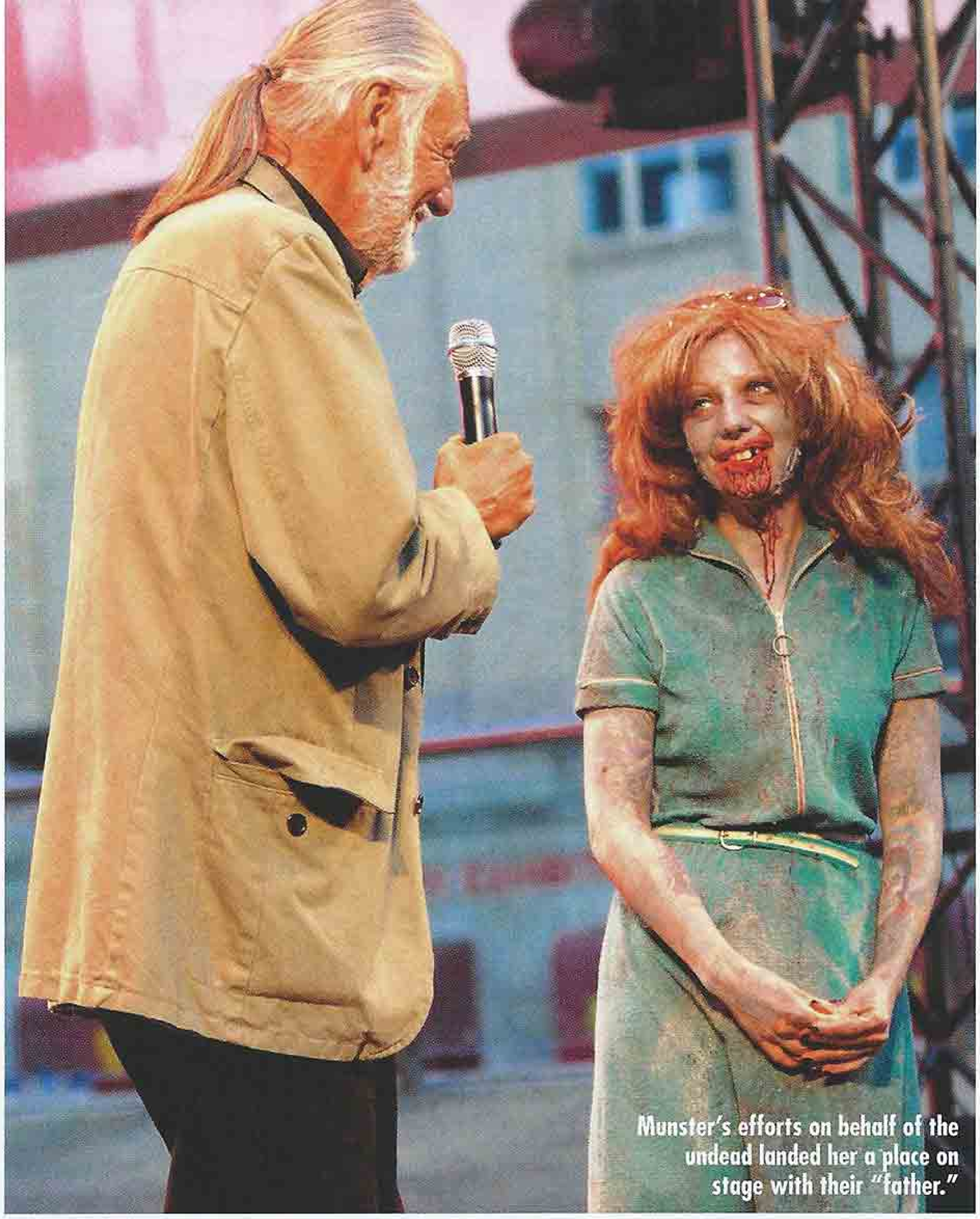
In fall 2009, *Survival of the Dead* premiered at Midnight Madness. Not only was this the film's coming-out party, it was also a celebration of Romero himself, who had recently received his Canadian citizenship. Midnight Madness' Colin Geddes approached me with the idea of having a special Zombie Walk in Romero's honor, and of course, we jumped at the opportunity. We organized The Toronto Zombie Walk Special Director's Cut Edition, which was later rechristened The Romero Zombie Walk.

The ghouls came out in droves. Many, including myself, chose a light blue *Dawn of the Dead* tone for their zombie skin. The undead horde made their way from Alexandria Park through the fashion district, and into the center of town at Yonge-Dundas Square. The zombies oozed as they lunged down a red carpet, stopping every so often to nibble on an onlooker, and then took their places in rows in front of a stage.

Romero was greeted with moans of approval as he walked onto that stage. He was presented with a memento that consisted of a mounted severed hand holding a statue of the CN Tower. If there had been any blood running through the cold bodies of the zombies that day, I am sure we all would have shed tears. Romero seemed surprised by the fanfare, and there wasn't one zombie not smiling by the time he left the stage.

Afterward, as I sat watching an outdoor screening of *Night of the Living Dead* with my fellow flesheaters, I realized: Home is definitely where the torn-out heart is.

—*Thea Munster*


Munster's efforts on behalf of the undead landed her a place on stage with their "father."

Photos: David Goodfellow

Even the walking dead need to rest their feet once in a while.

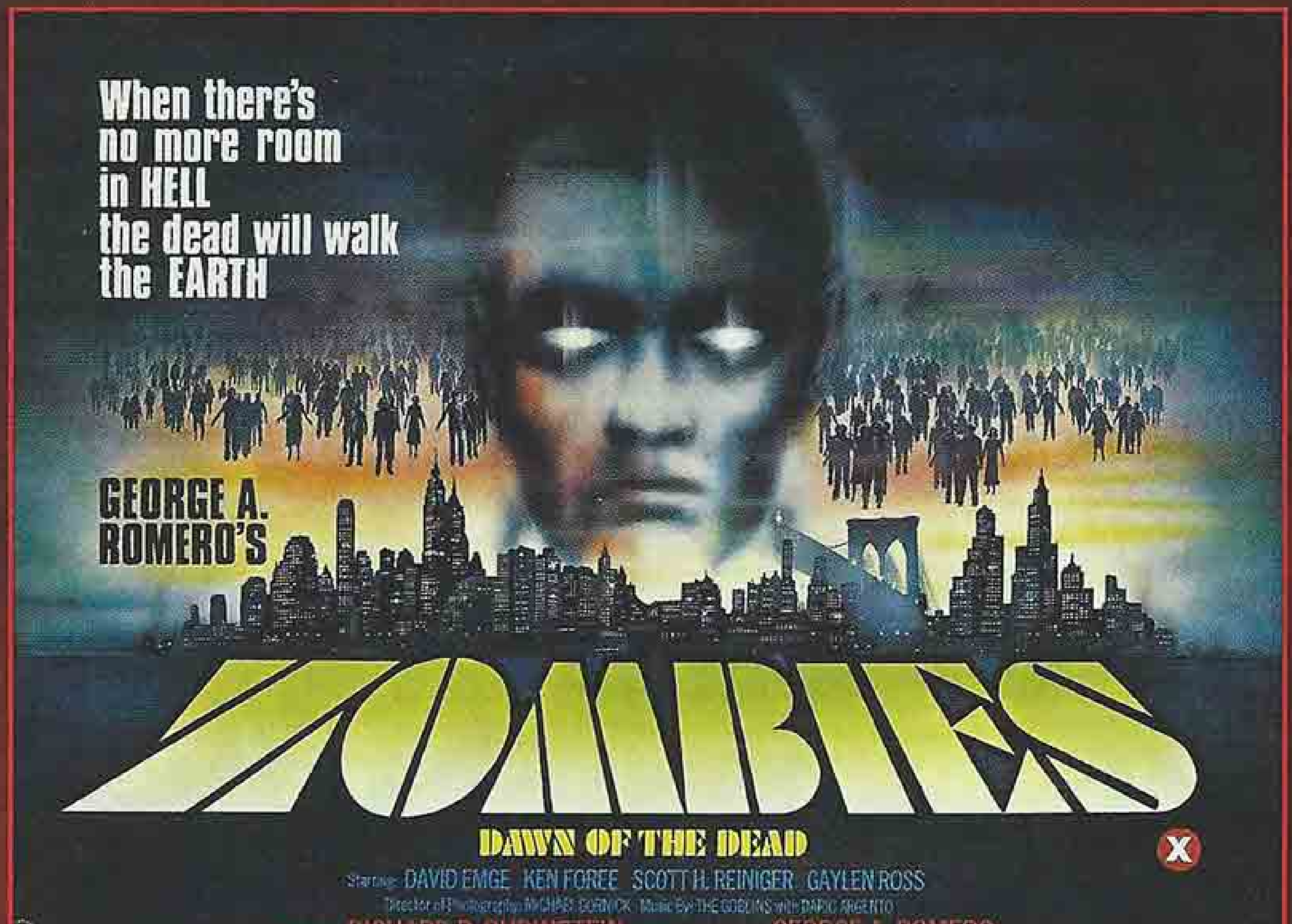
SELLING THE DEAD

The international posters for Romero's films have treated fans to striking sights all their own.

By TAL ZIMERMAN

In the years since *Night of the Living Dead* first shattered psyches across the world, the films of George A. Romero have amassed a legacy of advertising art that is staggering in its depth and variety. From rough sketches to masterful oil paintings, many of the images adorning his movie posters, especially those made during the first couple of decades of his career, remain emblematic of their respective titles.

Night of the Living Dead's notoriety grew slowly at first, and it has enjoyed theatrical rerelease every decade since it first hit screens in 1968. The early Italian art presents atmospheric graveyard scenes loaded with Gothic elegance, while the French '70s-era second-release poster (*La Nuit des Morts Vivants*) offers a harsh depiction of Barbra's assault by the undead, courtesy of illustrator Michel Landi. The '80s saw reissues in England, Germany and France, but wide release for the first time in Spain (as *La Noche de los Muertos Vivientes*). That country's poster, illustrated by Macario Gomez, recalls the nightmarish cemetery vibe of the Italian version, but trades in the grandeur for gross-out.


When there's no more room in HELL the dead will walk the EARTH
GEORGE A. ROMERO'S
ZOMBIES
DAWN OF THE DEAD
X
Starring DAVID EMGE KEN FOREE SCOTT H. REINIGER GAYLEN ROSS
Produced by RICHARD P. RUBINSTEIN Written and Directed by GEORGE A. ROMERO

Romero's next straight fright film was *The Crazies*, and the initial one-sheet's motif (see page 14) of the hazmat-suited soldier brandishing a blowtorch was the most often-used image. The French-release poster (bearing the title *La Nuit Des Fous Vivants*, or *Night of the Living Crazies*) ups the paranoia to uncomfortable levels, while the Italian art for its release as *Ecatombe* frames the action within a giant skull that is itself framed by black negative space.

Martin marked the first collaboration between Romero and graphic designer Lanny Powers. This nontraditional take on the very traditional subject of vampirism forced Powers to think laterally, creating the basic but punchy image that represents the film. His first concept differed slightly from the end result: "The original design was of a valentine heart being cut by a razor blade," Powers says. "The type was to look as though it had been drawn with blood, and the 'T' was extended to symbolize a stake." The simplicity on the final U.S. version stands opposite to the Thai variation—which, in typical Thai fashion, is busy with scenes from the movie.

For Powers' next gig with Romero, he took inspiration from footage he saw while the film was still in production. "I was watching the dailies, and the image of one of the zombies with a bald head stuck in my mind," he explains. "I sketched it, and it was lying on my desk partially covered by another sheet of paper, revealing the upper portion of the face. I saw it as a sunrise." If it's not obvious, Powers is describing the inception of his poster design for *Dawn of the Dead*.

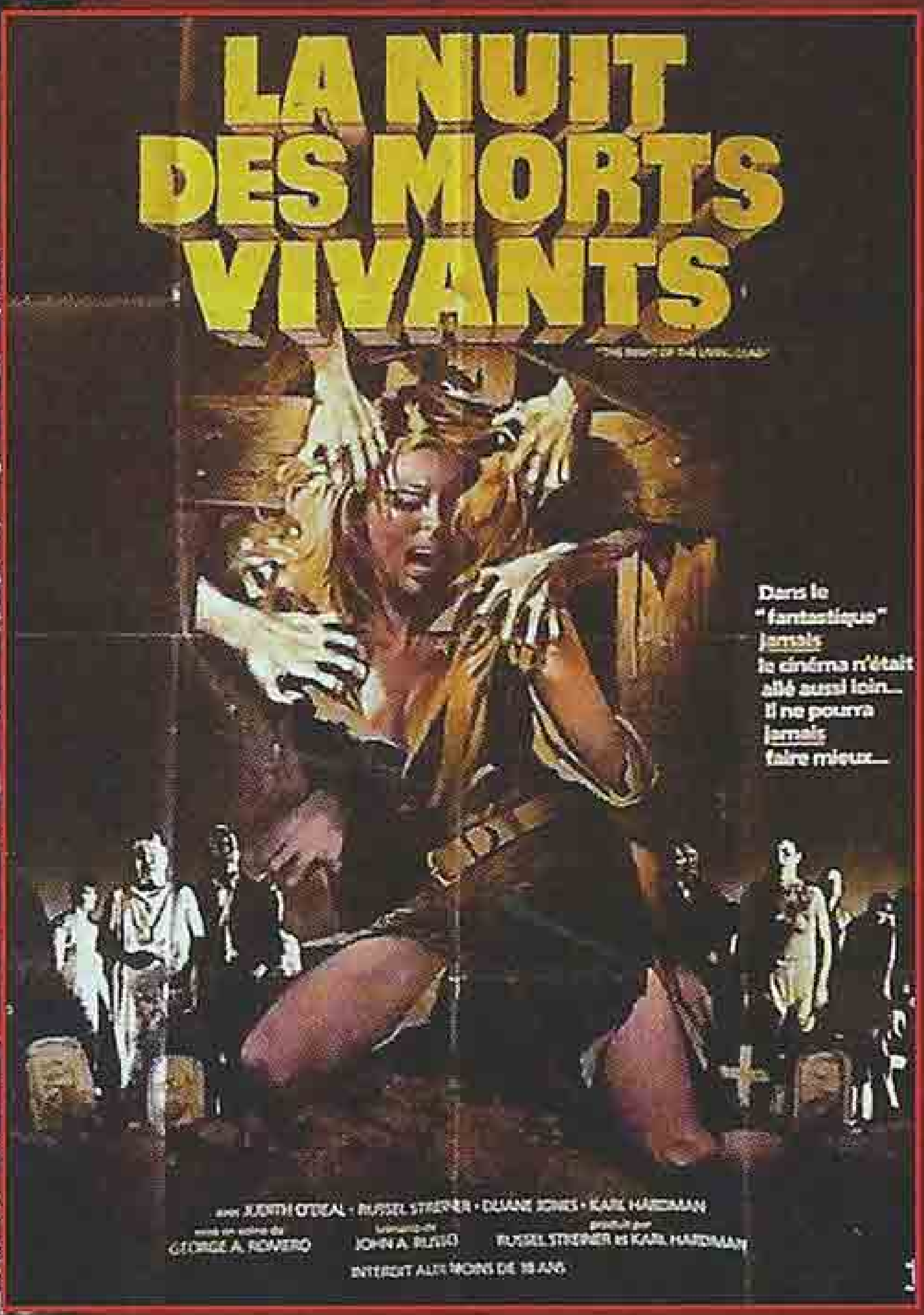
Powers' propaganda-style rising-head motif first appeared on an advance poster that features green text instead of the more common red version that ultimately fronted the full release (see page 25). Variations on this theme were used in Spain and Italy (where, as elsewhere in Europe, the film was known as *Zombie* or *Zombi*) and Australia. Germany, in addition to its own take on the rising head, was treated to several designs, one of which features an abstract image reminiscent of the styles more prominent in countries like Poland and the Czech Republic. Elsewhere, Belgium's one-sheet displays the charming chicken-scratch drawing that would eventually end up on the cover of the film's incidental music soundtrack. The Thai poster employs a hand-rendered cluster of key scenes, while one Japanese design uses a still from the elevator attack overlaying a hellish red backdrop. Top British illustrator Tom Chantrell was the culprit behind the gorgeous UK quad.

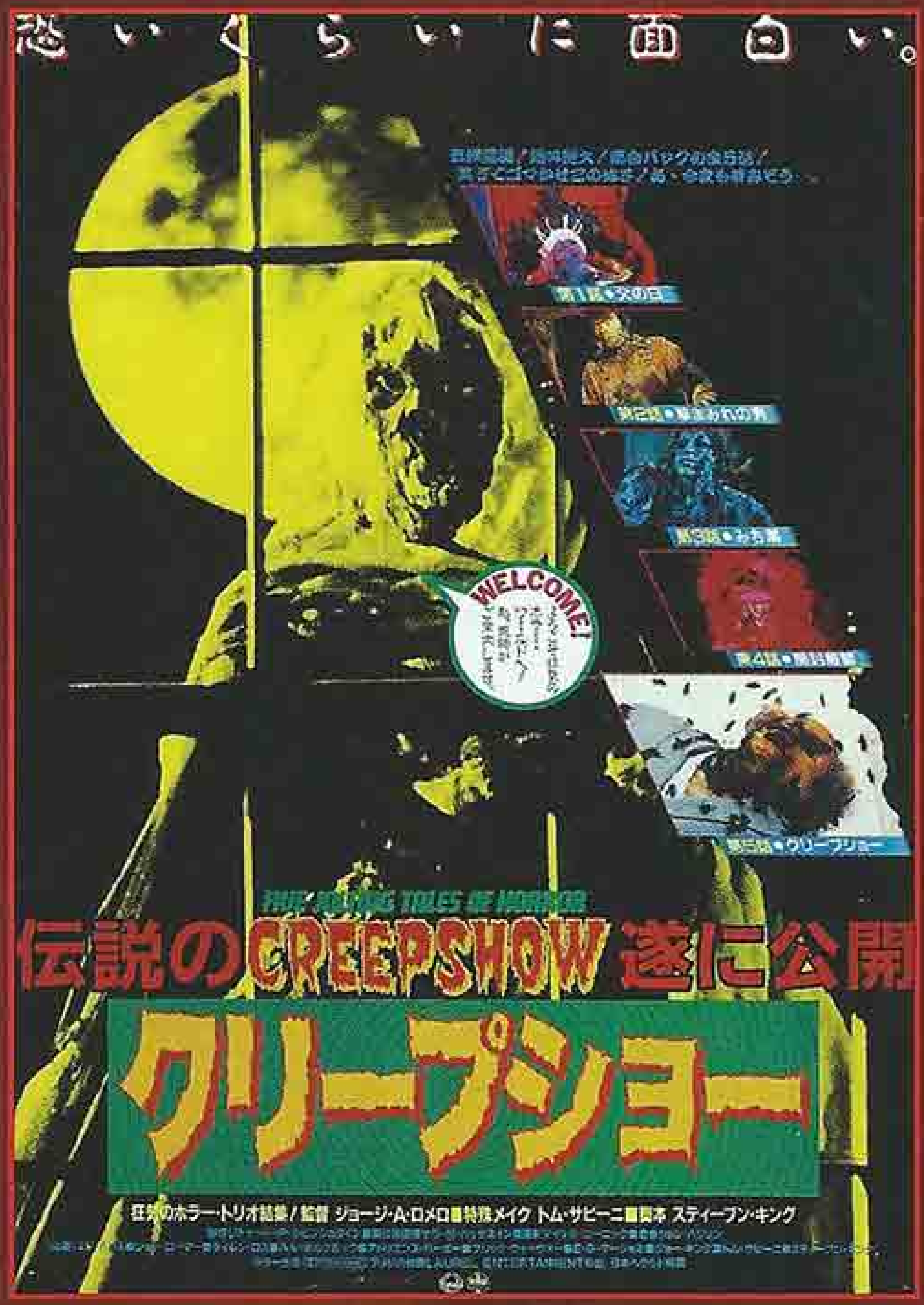
Clearly pleased with *Dawn*'s success, United Film Distribution afforded Romero the chance to hire noted fantasy artist Boris Vallejo to create the iconic poster art for his next film, *Knightriders*, with Ed Harris sitting proudly on his trusty mechanical steed, spiked mace in hand (see page 27). Vallejo primarily worked from production stills, but received guidance from Romero himself. "I spoke directly to George," he remembers. "He was quite specific about what he had in mind. Our talks made the work much easier for me." He reflects on the film with enthusiasm: "George did a magnificent job of portraying a man totally and passionately devoted to his art, regardless of the consequences. The imagery was often somber, in contrast to the carnival settings."

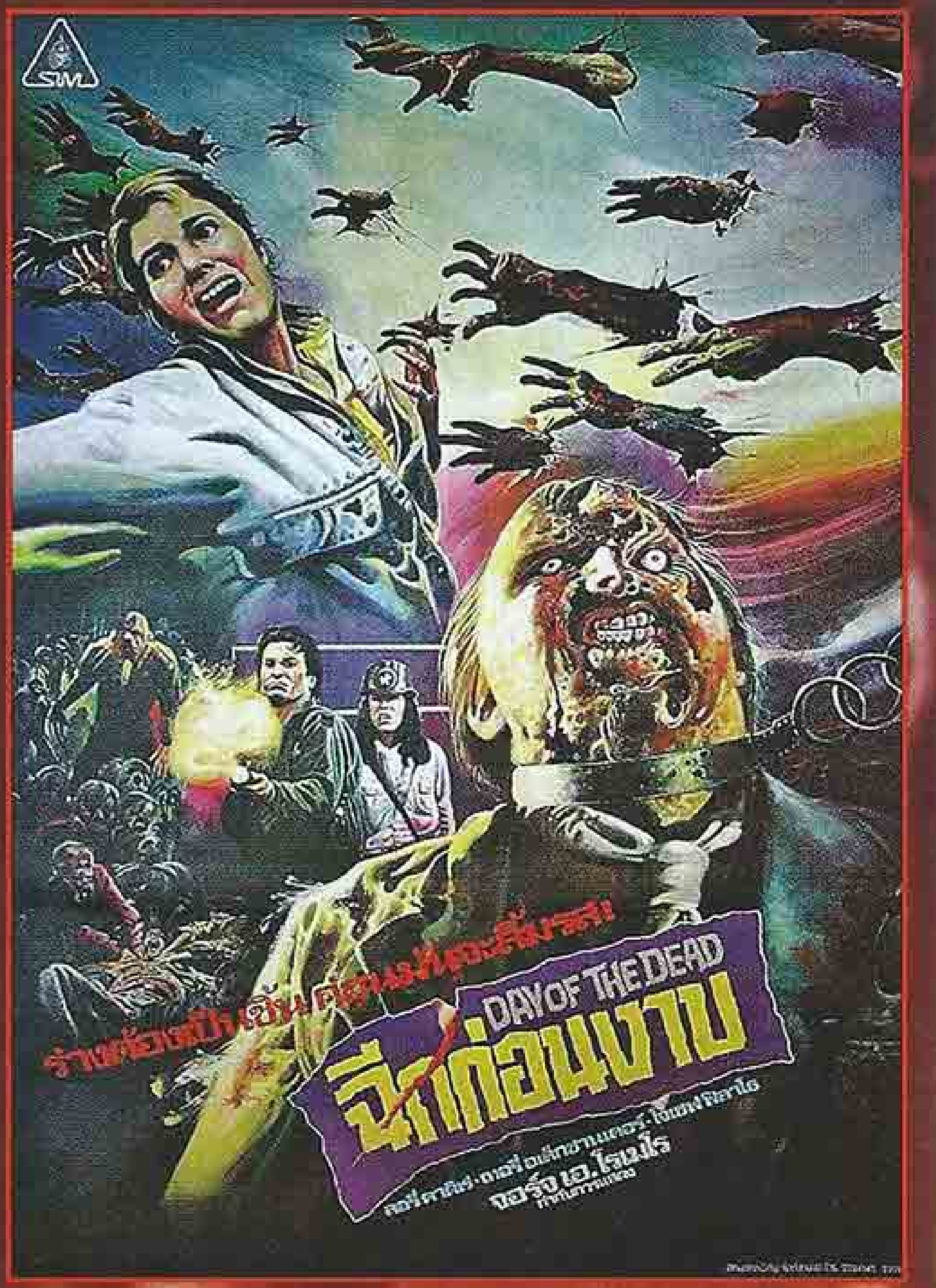
Up next was *Creepshow*, whose posters fall into two distinct categories: those that borrow from EC legend Jack Kamen's original one-sheet for UFD, which also graced the cover of the accompanying large-size comic book, and those that draw inspiration from Bernie Wrightson's interior artwork for that tie-in. Kamen's design appears on the German, Belgian and Argentinean posters, as well as the international one-sheet. His skeletal Creep was the inspiration for Joann Daley's design for the new American poster (see page 32) after Warner Bros. acquired the film—perhaps the scariest movie illustration ever to accompany the words "children" and "fun." Her art was also used for the Spanish and Australian releases. In France, Laurent Melki's one-eyed Creep follows Kamen's vision, while Wrightson's jovial, two-eyed character was appropriated by Tom Chantrell in the UK and Renato Casaro in Italy, who turned out their own grinning variations. The only country to buck the trend was Japan, whose poster utilizes photographic images as opposed to illustrated ones.

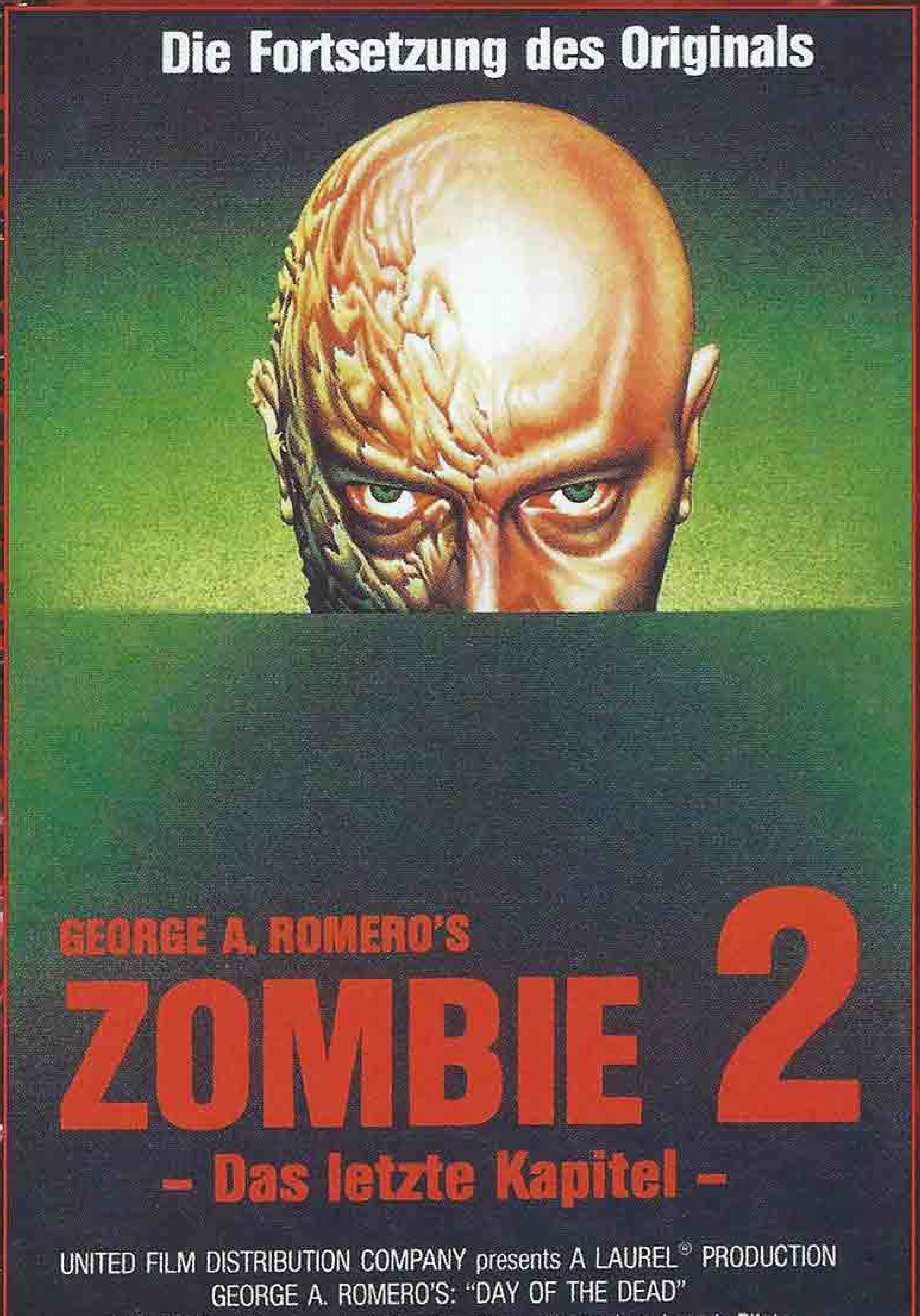
Finally, we get to *Day of the Dead*. Obviously, this was not Romero's last feature, but it was during this time that many poster styles began to succumb to global trends toward uniformity, leaving little to discuss. Even countries like France, Spain and England, which up to that time traditionally boasted hand-created artwork, went the production-still route for *Day*. Notable illustrated designs for this film came courtesy of Germany, whose version (titled *Zombie 2*) updates Powers' *Dawn* concept by closing the gap between graphic and literal, and Thailand, where artist Jinda's design leaps off the page, displaying Sarah's opening nightmare alongside some gut-munching and a particularly rotted ghoul shown moments before his onscreen demise.

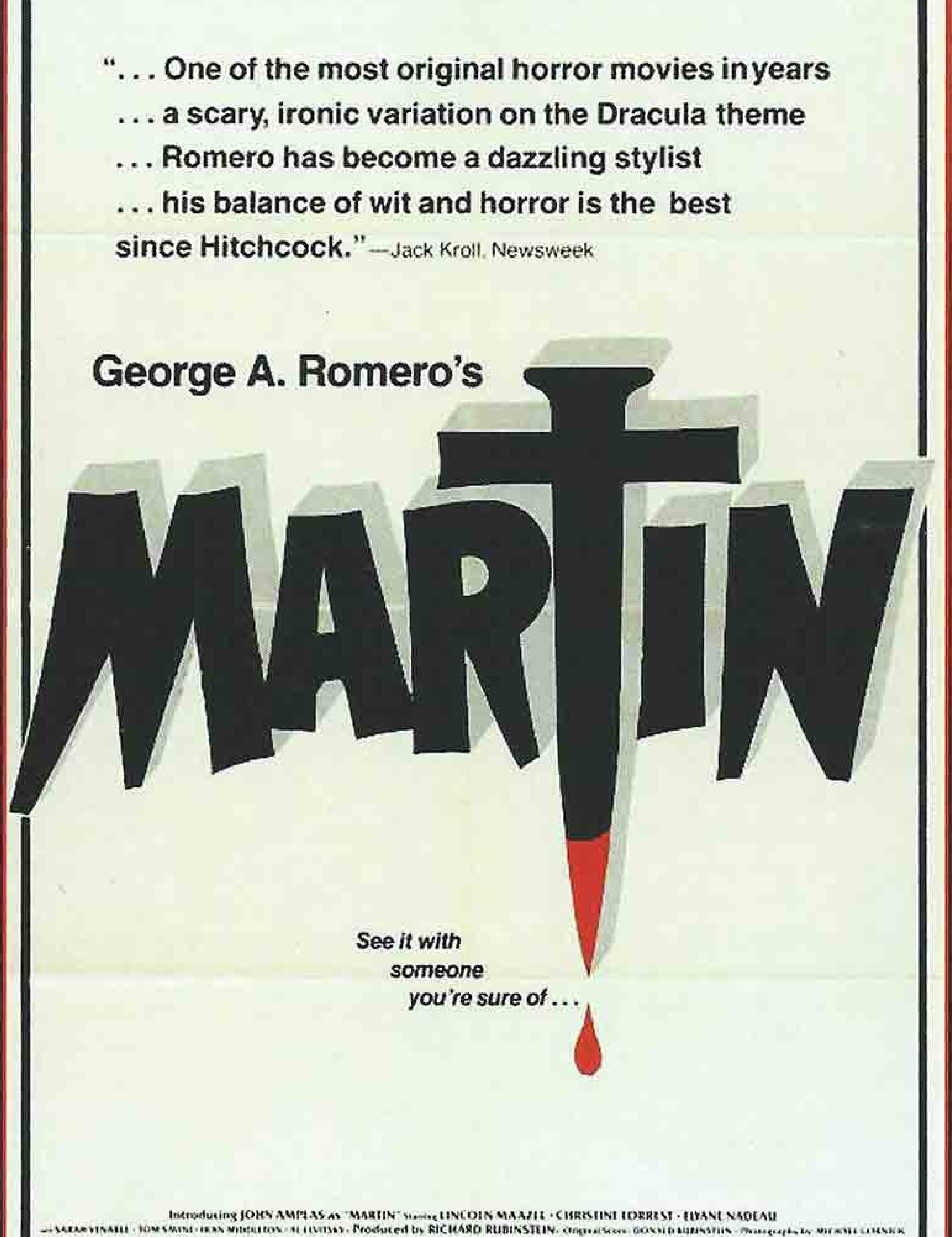
Ending here means a few unfortunate omissions (*Creepshow 2*, *Two Evil Eyes* and the 1990 remake of *Night of the Living Dead* all had standout posters), but the artifacts from early years are more than enough to chew on. There is so much more out there, and with the Internet, appreciating Romero's legacy via the posters for his films has never been easier.

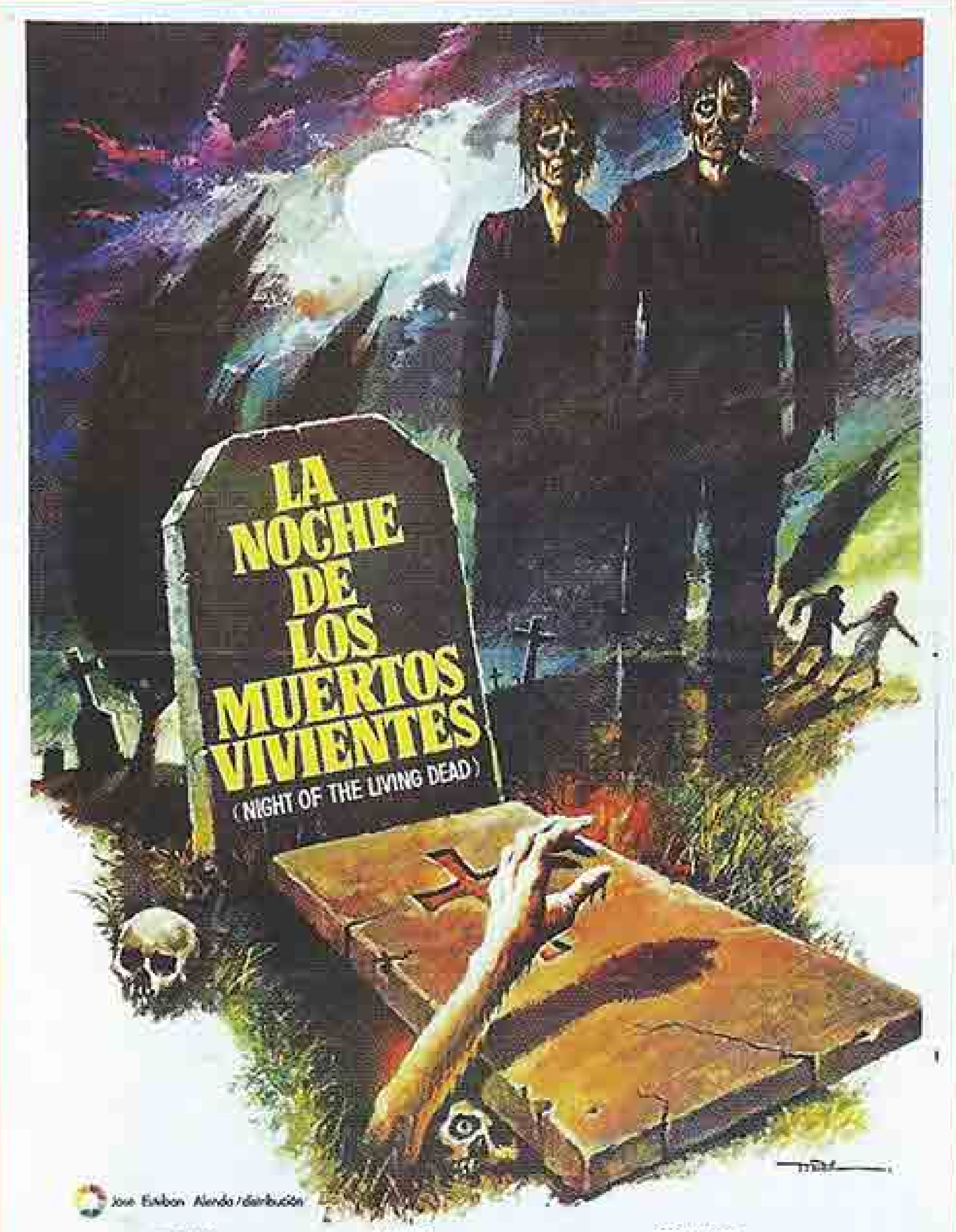

LA NUIT DES MORTS VIVANTS
"THE NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD"
Dans le "fantastique" jamais le cinéma n'était allé aussi loin... Il ne pourra jamais faire mieux...
avec JUDITH O'DEA · RUSSEL STREINER · DUANE JONES · KARL HARDMAN
mise en scène de GEORGE A. ROMERO
scénario de JOHN A. RUSSO
produit par RUSSEL STREINER et KARL HARDMAN
INTERDIT AUX MOINS DE 18 ANS

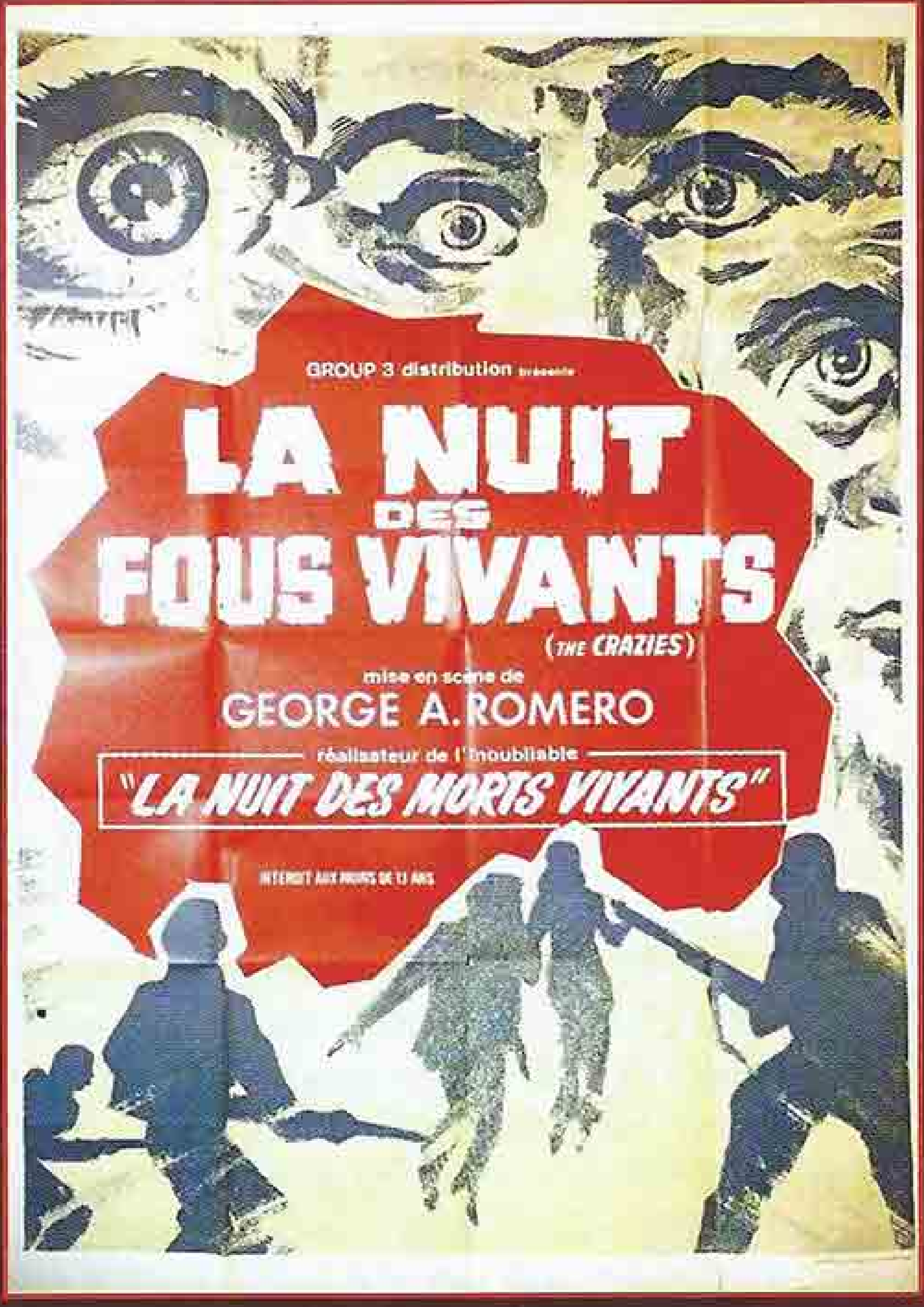

恐いくらいに面白い。
WELCOME!
THE AMAZING TALES OF HORROR
伝説のCREEPSHOW遂に公開
クリープショー

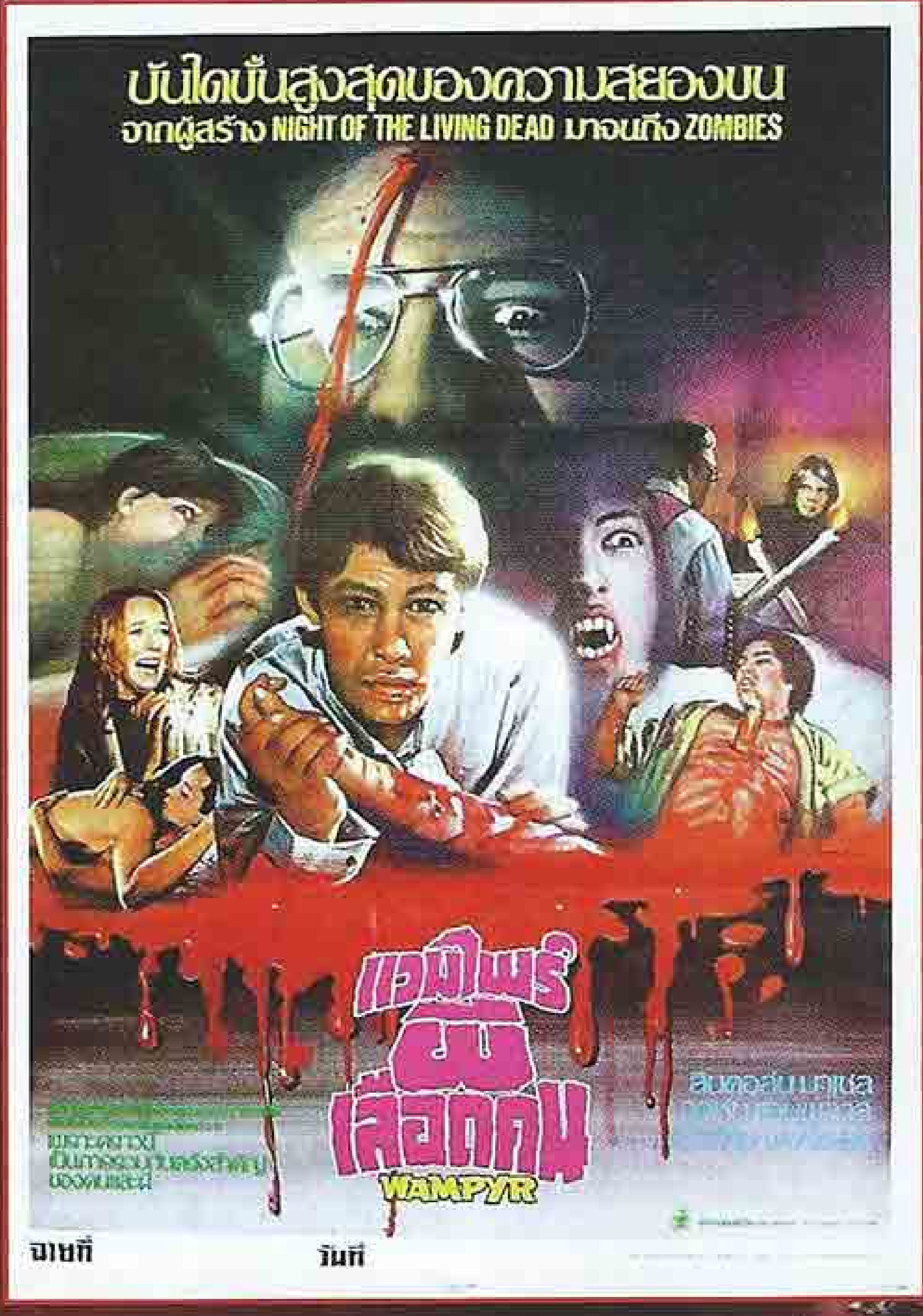

DAY OF THE DEAD
ฉีกก่อนงาบ

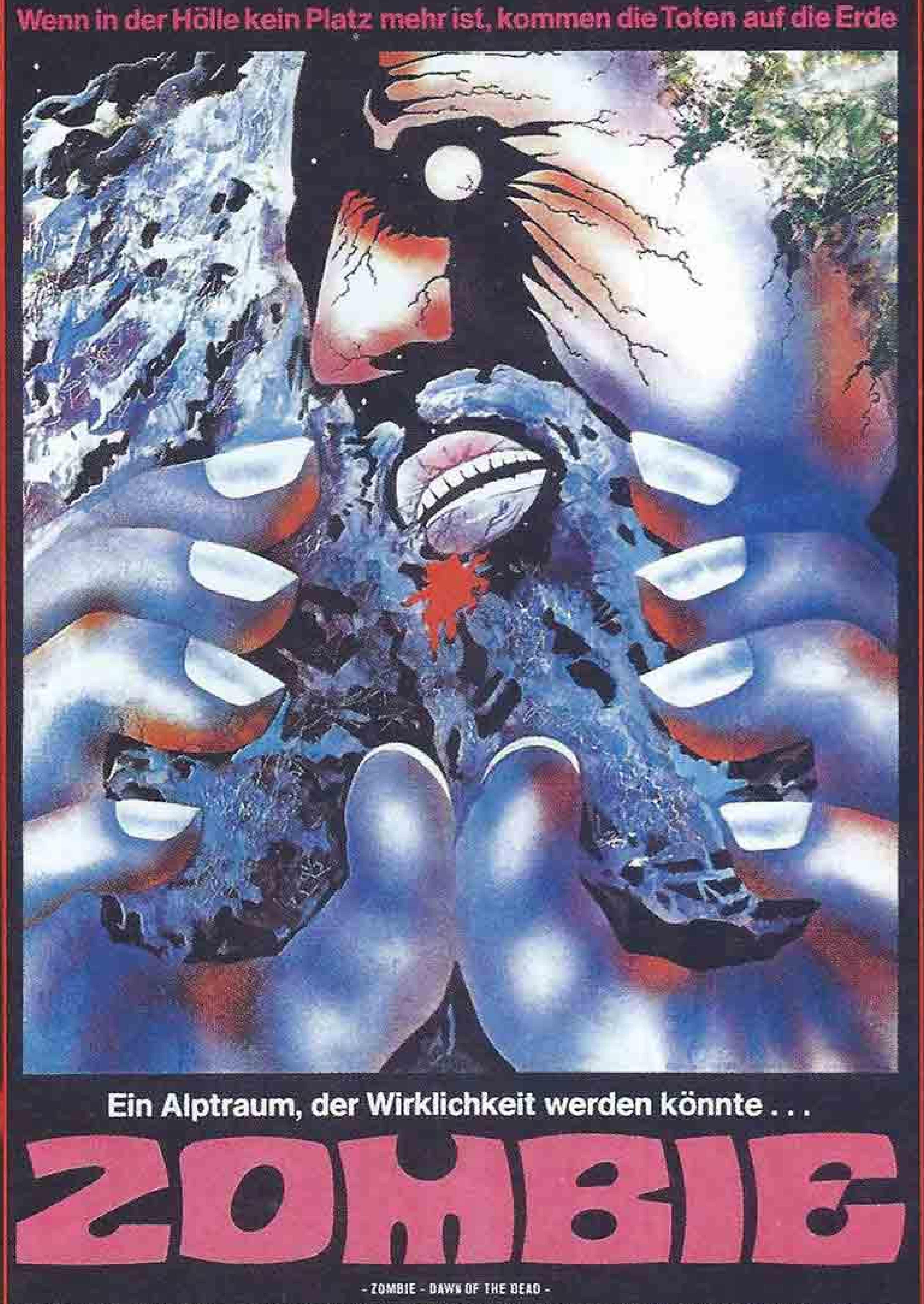

Die Fortsetzung des Originals
GEORGE A. ROMERO'S
ZOMBIE 2
– Das letzte Kapitel –
UNITED FILM DISTRIBUTION COMPANY presents A LAUREL® PRODUCTION
GEORGE A. ROMERO'S: "DAY OF THE DEAD"
THE CAST · Starring: Lori Cardille; Terry Alexander; Joseph Pilato
Featuring: Richard Liberty as "Logan" and Howard Sherman as "Bub"
Im Verleih der ALEMANNIA-ELYSEE-FILM

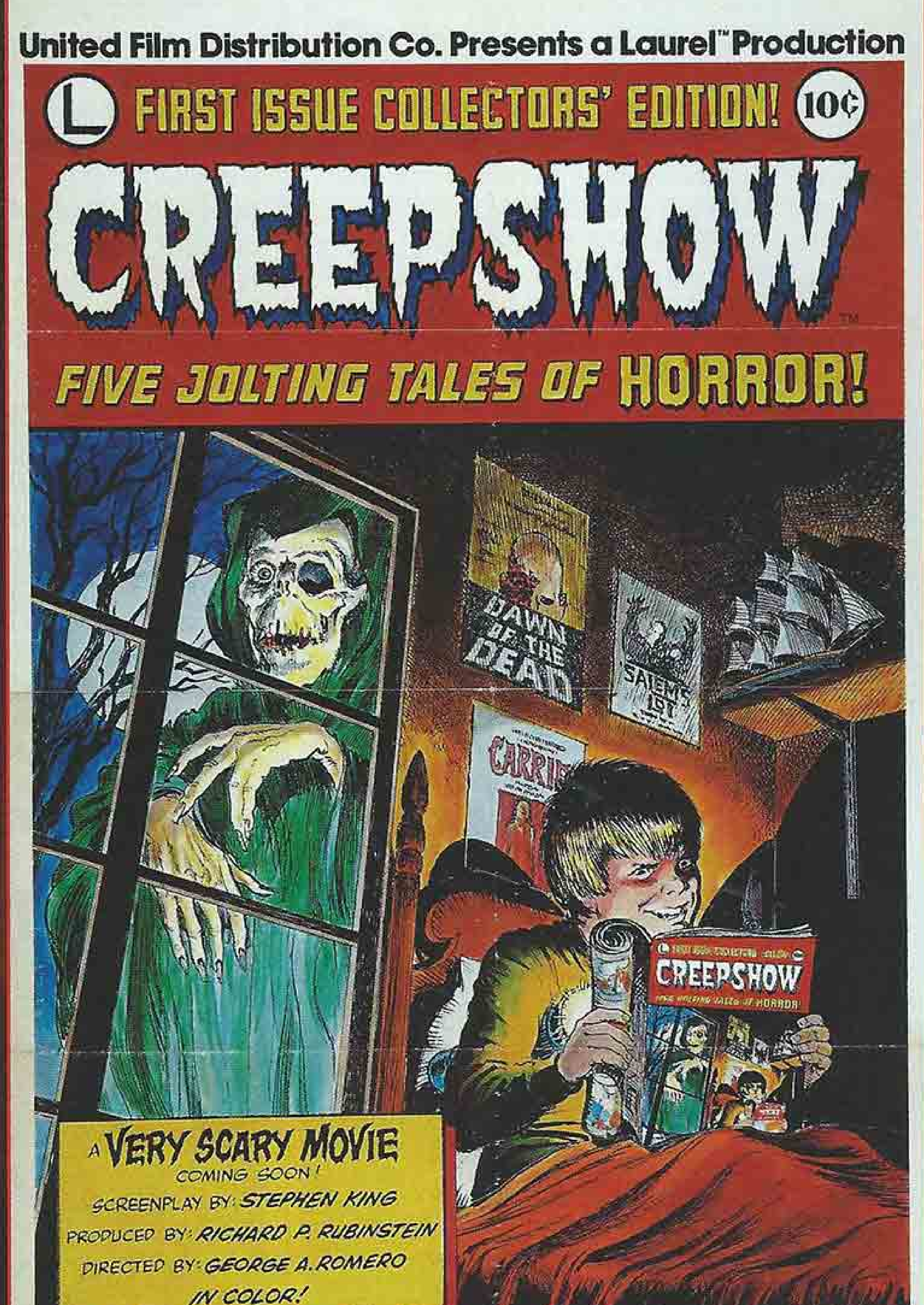

"... One of the most original horror movies in years
... a scary, ironic variation on the Dracula theme
... Romero has become a dazzling stylist
... his balance of wit and horror is the best since Hitchcock." —Jack Kroll, Newsweek
George A. Romero's
MARTIN
See it with someone you're sure of...
Introducing JOHN AMPLAS as "MARTIN" starring LINCOLN MAAZEL · CHRISTINE FORREST · ELYANE NADEAU
Produced by RICHARD RUBINSTEIN
A Laurel Film
IN COLOR
A Libra Films Release


LA NOCHE DE LOS MUERTOS VIVIENTES
(NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD)
José Esteban Alenda / distribución
UN FILM DE
GEORGE A. ROMERO · JOHN A. RUSSO y GEORGE A. ROMERO · RUSSEL W. STREINER y KARL HARDMAN
GUION DE
PRODUCIDA POR
CON JUDITH O'DEA · DUANE JONES · MARILYN EASTMAN · KARL HARDMAN · JUDITH RIDLEY · KEITH WAYNE


GROUP 3 distribution présente
LA NUIT DES FOUS VIVANTS
(THE CRAZIES)
mise en scène de
GEORGE A. ROMERO
réalisateur de l'inoubliable
"LA NUIT DES MORTS VIVANTS"
INTERDIT AUX MOINS DE 13 ANS


บันไดขั้นสูงสุดของความสยองขน
จากผู้สร้าง NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD มาจนถึง ZOMBIES
แวมไพร์ ผี เลือดคน
WAMPYR
ฉายที่
วันที่


Wenn in der Hölle kein Platz mehr ist, kommen die Toten auf die Erde
Ein Alptraum, der Wirklichkeit werden könnte . . .
ZOMBIE
- ZOMBIE - DAWN OF THE DEAD -
DAVID EMGE · KEN FOREE · SCOTT H. REINIGER · GAYLEN ROSS · DREHBUCH UND REGIE: GEORGE A. ROMERO
Dario Argento zeigt ZOMBIE Musik: The Goblin in Zusammenarbeit mit Dario Argento Produziert von Richard P. Rubinstein für Laurel Group, Inc. Eine Produktion von Claudio Argento und Alfredo Cuomo
Constantin Film


United Film Distribution Co. Presents a Laurel™ Production
L
FIRST ISSUE COLLECTORS' EDITION!
10¢
CREEPSHOW™
FIVE JOLTING TALES OF HORROR!
DAWN OF THE DEAD
SALEM'S LOT
CARRIE
CREEPSHOW
A VERY SCARY MOVIE
COMING SOON!
SCREENPLAY BY: STEPHEN KING
PRODUCED BY: RICHARD P. RUBINSTEIN
DIRECTED BY: GEORGE A. ROMERO
IN COLOR!
KAMEN
© 1981 Laurel-Show Inc.
"CREEPSHOW"

TRIBUTES TO GEORGE A. ROMERO

Compiled by CHRIS ALEXANDER, MICHAEL GINGOLD, BEKAH McKENDRY and SEAN SMITHSON

Roger Corman, director/producer/mogul: "My favorite Romero film is the first picture he made, *Night of the Living Dead*, because I thought he brought a totally original look to horror films, and the concept of it. Just the visuals of *Night* I thought were great. It did strike me as being more graphic than, particularly the films I'd been making, and also the films I'd been seeing. On the other hand, if you look at it today, it's not so graphic. The world has moved on, and films have become rougher.

"His greatest contribution to horror has been his originality. He really did bring a new look, a new sensibility to a genre that may have been getting a little bit tired. There was a certain bit of repetition in the horror films [at the time], and *Night of the Living Dead* was almost revolutionary."

Herschell Gordon Lewis, the "Godfather of Gore": "I especially love *Land of the Dead*. In this one, George proves why he is king of the celluloid zombie-fighters, with his patented combination of reality and fantasy."

Larry Fessenden, director/producer: "I always cite *Night of the Living Dead* as my favorite horror movie. It is an impossible choice, of course, but I'm happy to live with it. I grew up in a generation who saw the old Universal horror movies on TV, and those films will always have a place in my heart. But when I saw *Night*, I felt a sense of genuine anguish, I experienced real fear. The film opens in a graveyard and one of the characters speaks with a Boris Karloff accent, referencing the very films I'd grown up with, and then he is killed by a stalking stranger and the film spirals into an existential nightmare that seemed to say old horror is a thing of the past."

Jack Ketchum, author: "Without George A. Romero, there would be no *Off Season*. Without *Off Season*, there'd be no Jack Ketchum."

Ti West, director: "To me, the greatest thing about George A. Romero is that there's an element in all of his films where the horror is secondary, and it's almost a metaphor or social commentary. That raises it above the lowest common denominator; his movies are not just zombie movies, they're actually…I don't want to say political commentary, because it's not, but it is social commentary, and there's an overwhelming metaphor to what the horror means, beyond just zombies biting someone. What's a shame about horror now is it's just focused on the zombies eating people, and not a subtext. Romero's really fantastic, and one of the first at doing that the best."

Paco Plaza, director: "To say that George A. Romero is an important figure in my life is pretty close to obvious. I think all filmmakers who practice the genre, especially those who have made movies with zombies—undead, infected, slow, fast—have been inspired by him, and somehow we are all indebted to him. It has always been said that Romero has used social and political subtext as his bedrock; they are his hallmarks. And he has contributed greatly to their inclusion in the horror genre. He aims high intellectually. It's part of what has made George a giant.

"When asked about my favorite Romero film, I immediately knew which one I wanted to remark on: the wonderful *Monkey Shines*! I consider the she-monkey to be one of the greatest femme fatales in the history of cinema. *Monkey Shines* is an expert exercise in incredible precision and brutal tension. Our teacher, Mr. Romero, displays a virtuosity in staging that demonstrates the measure of his talent as a storyteller and instructor in the exploration of cinematic terror. Many times, when we revisit films we loved in our youth, we end up frowning in disap-

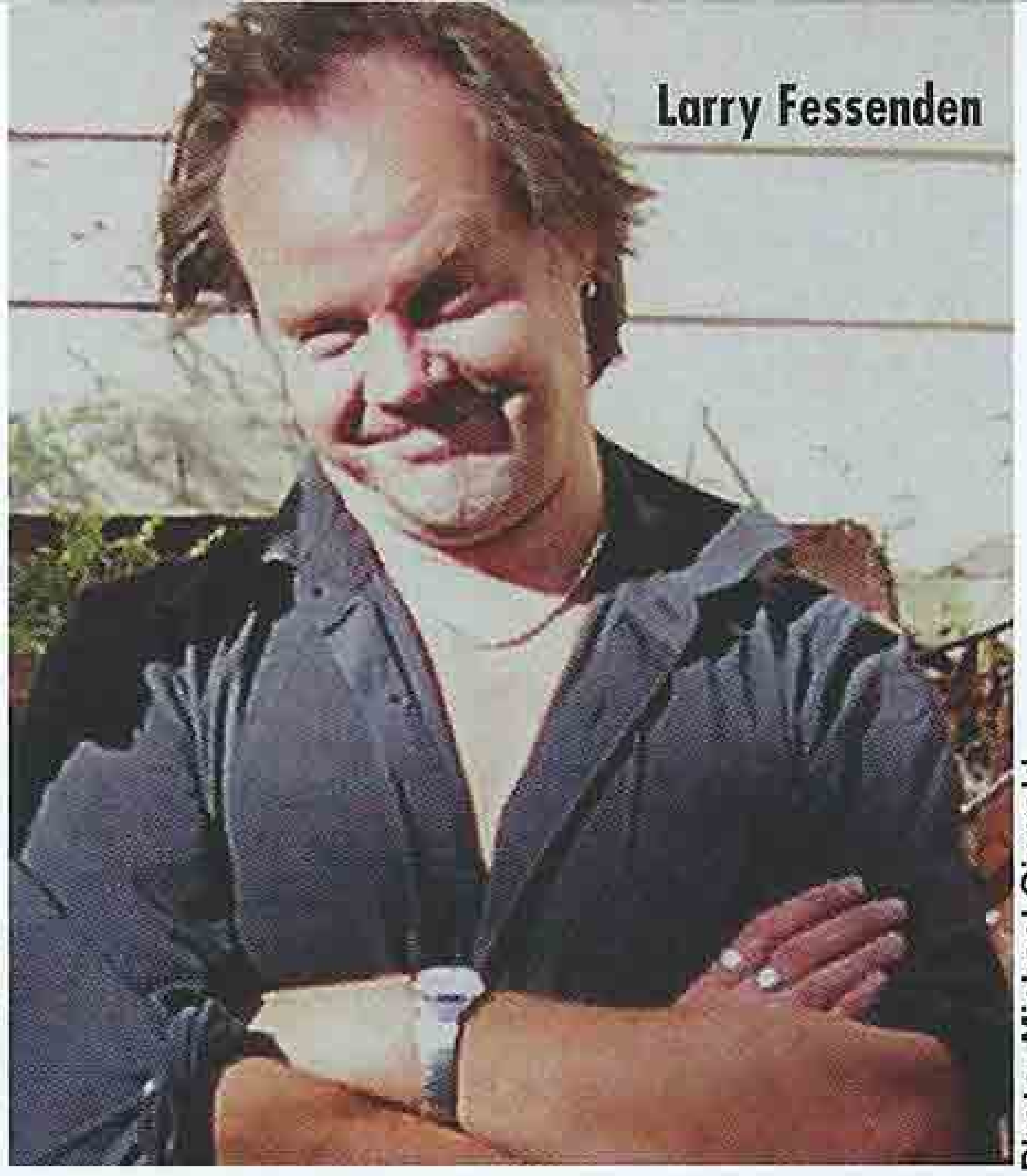

Larry Fessenden

Photo: Michael Gingold

Jack Ketchum

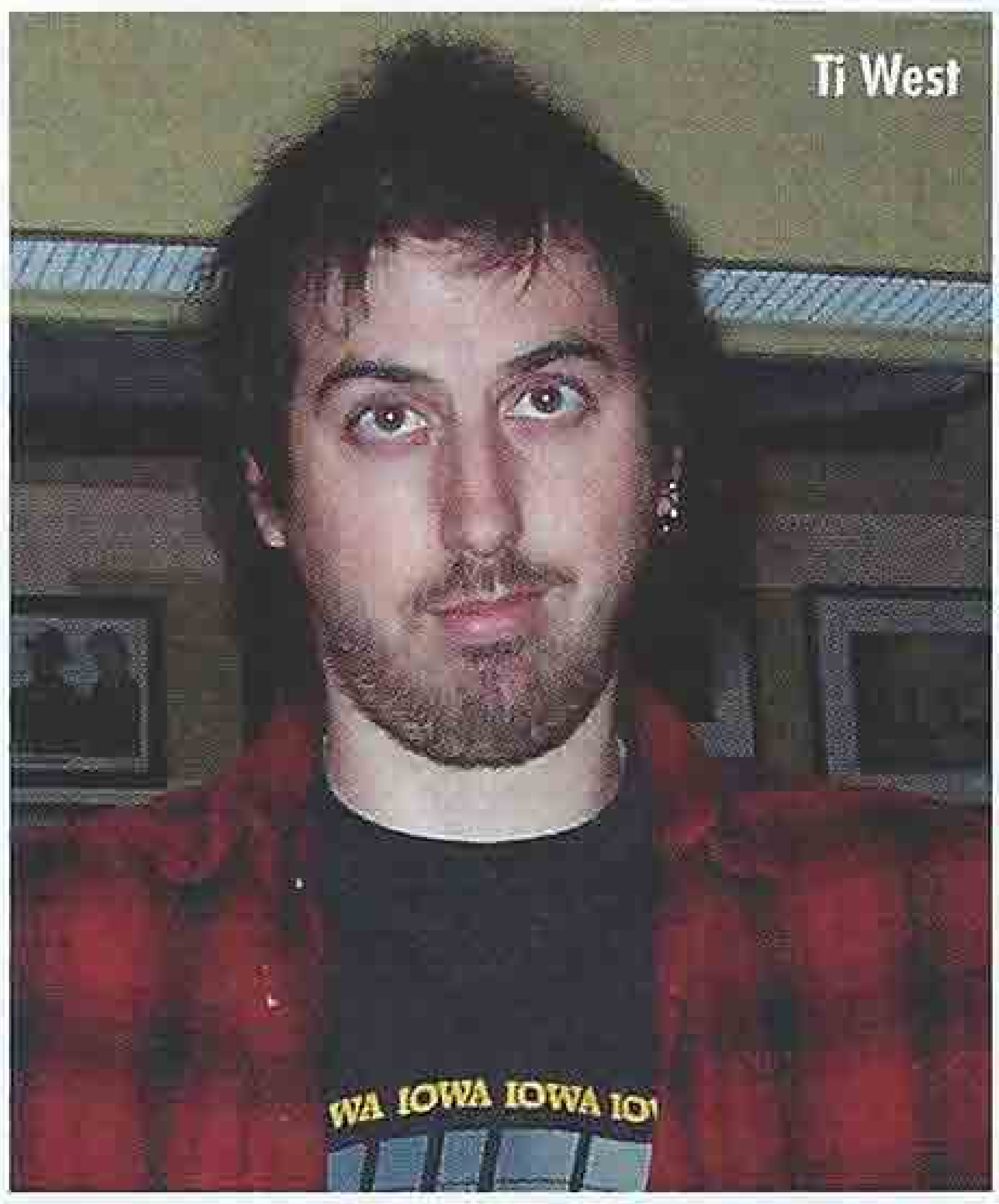
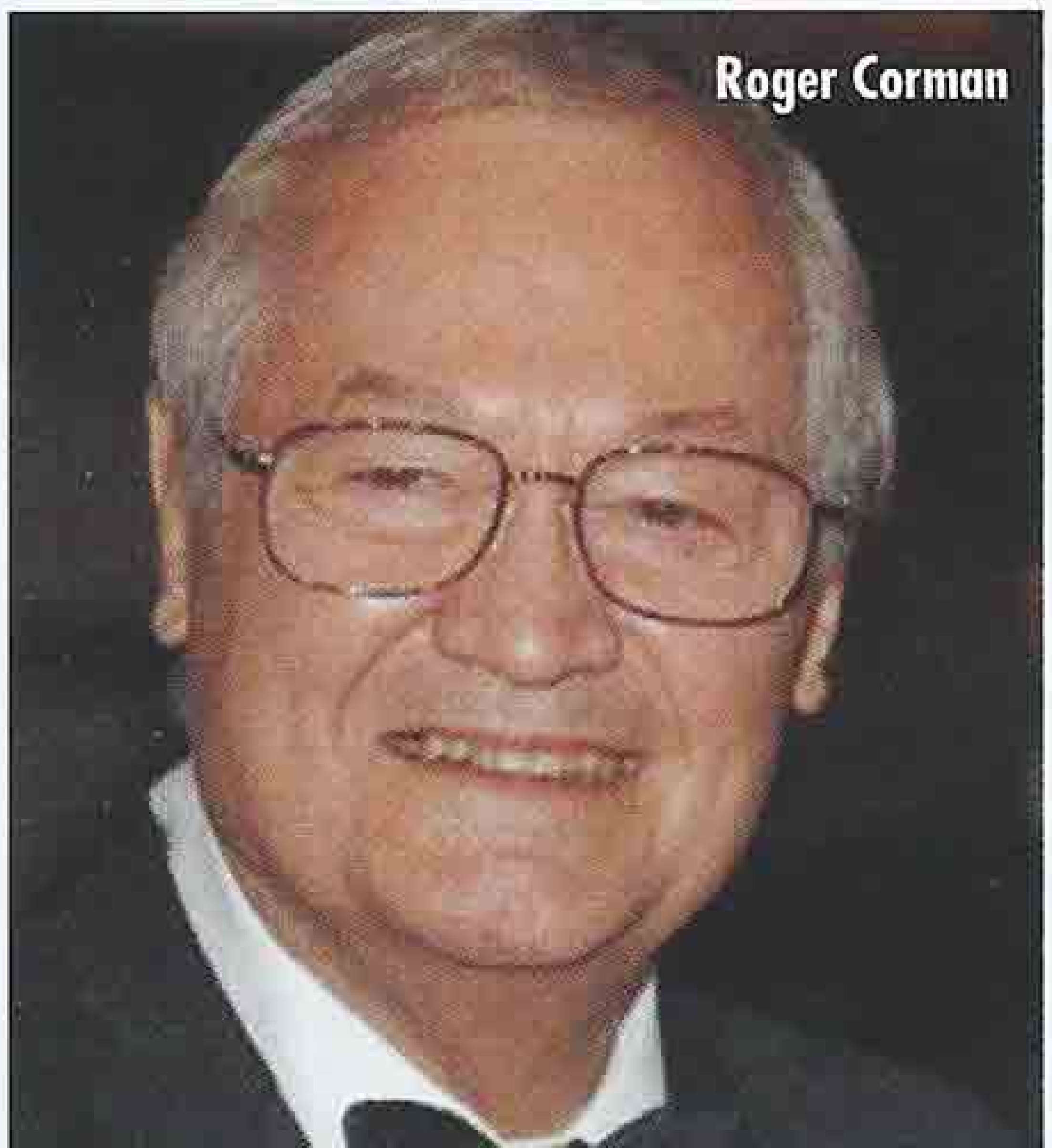
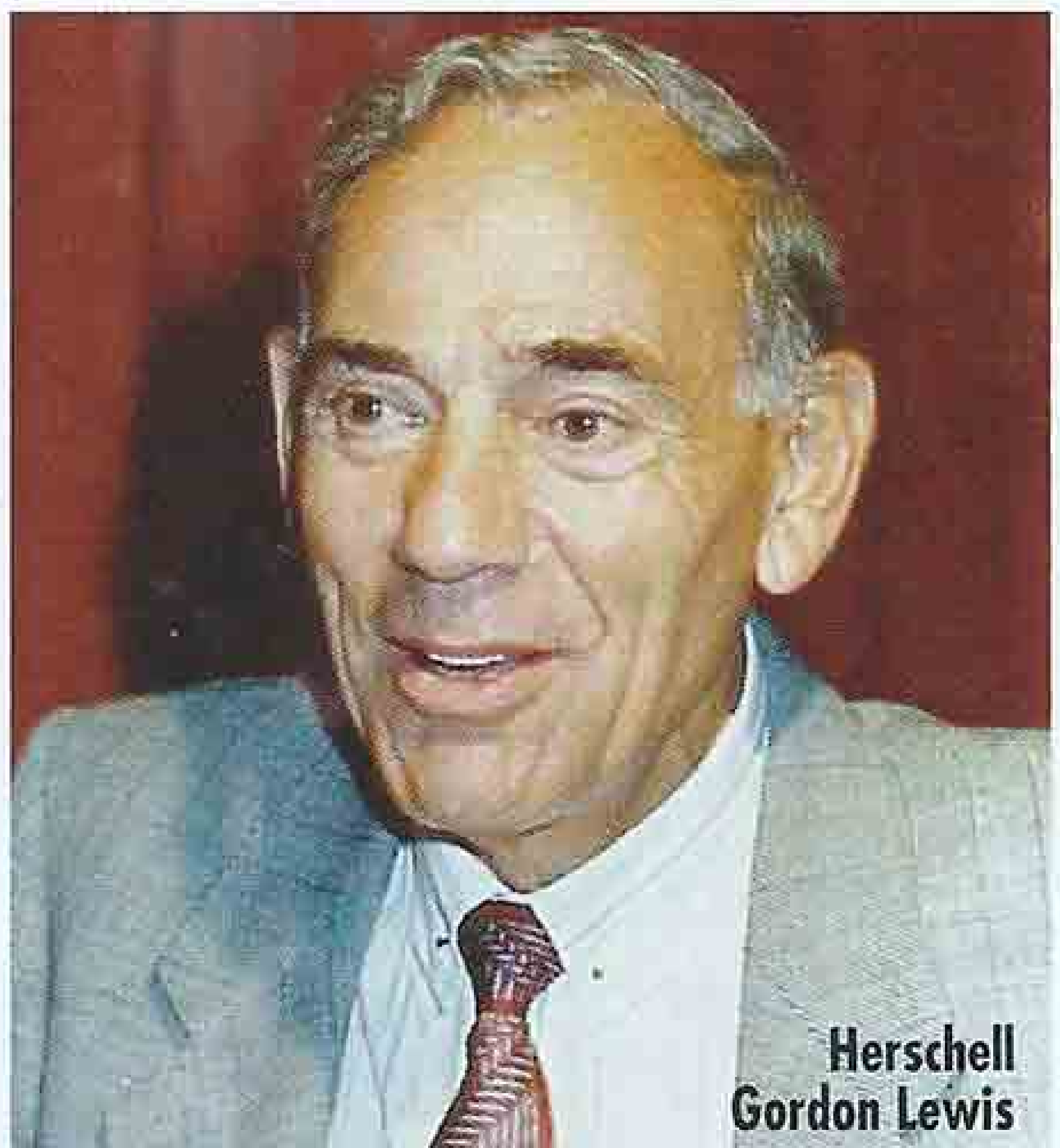
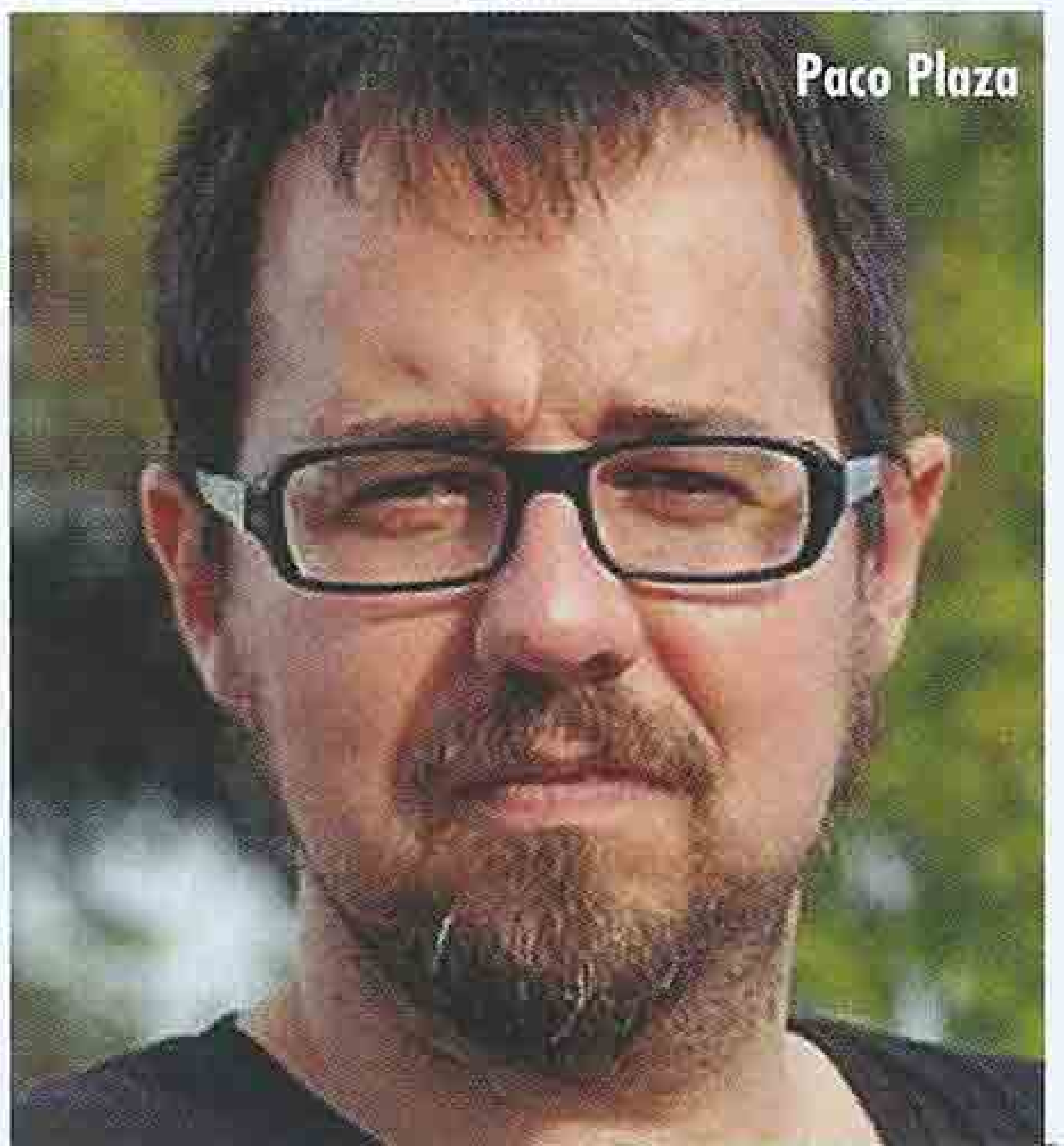

Ti West

Photo: Michael Gingold


Roger Corman


Herschell Gordon Lewis


Paco Plaza

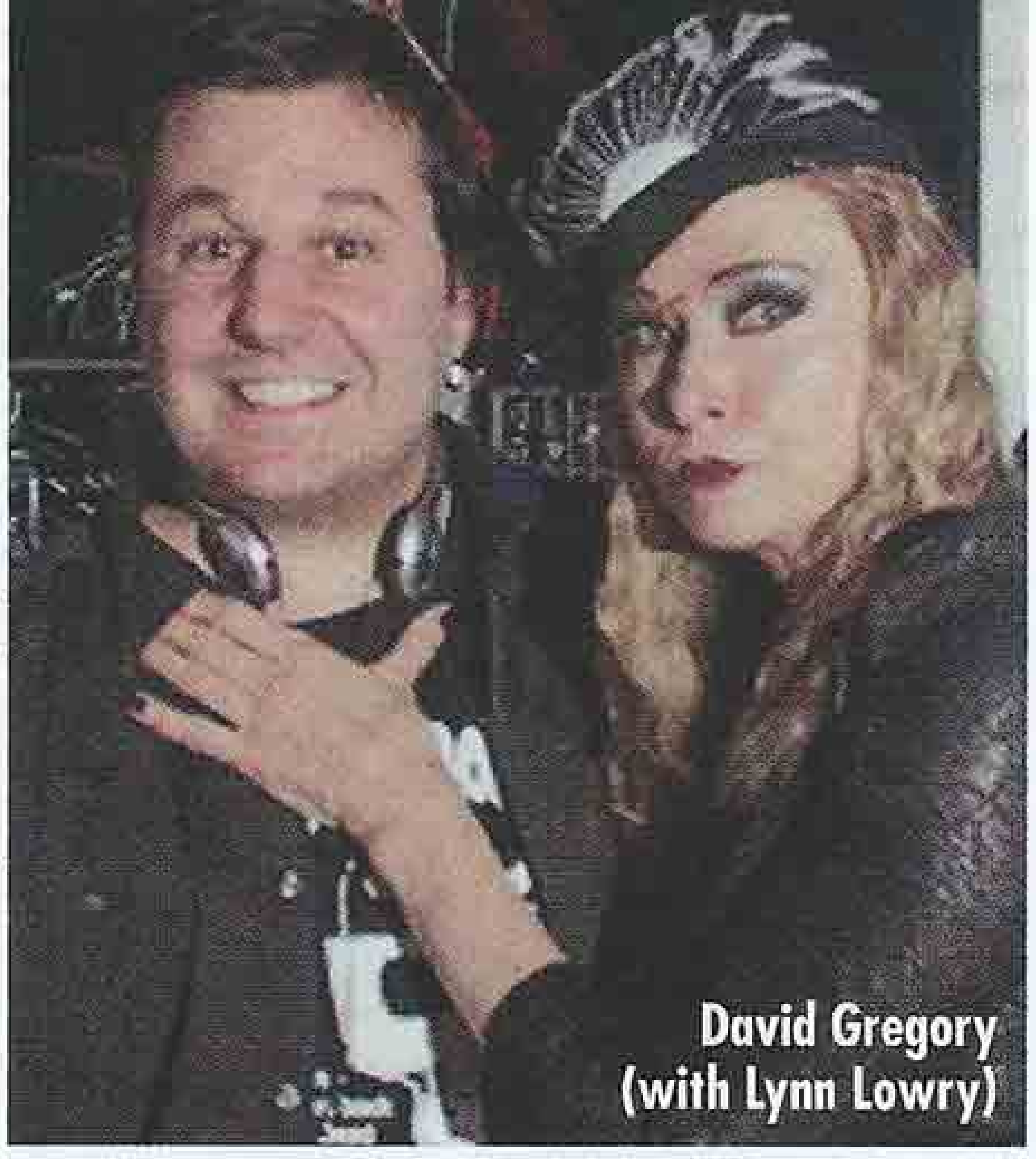
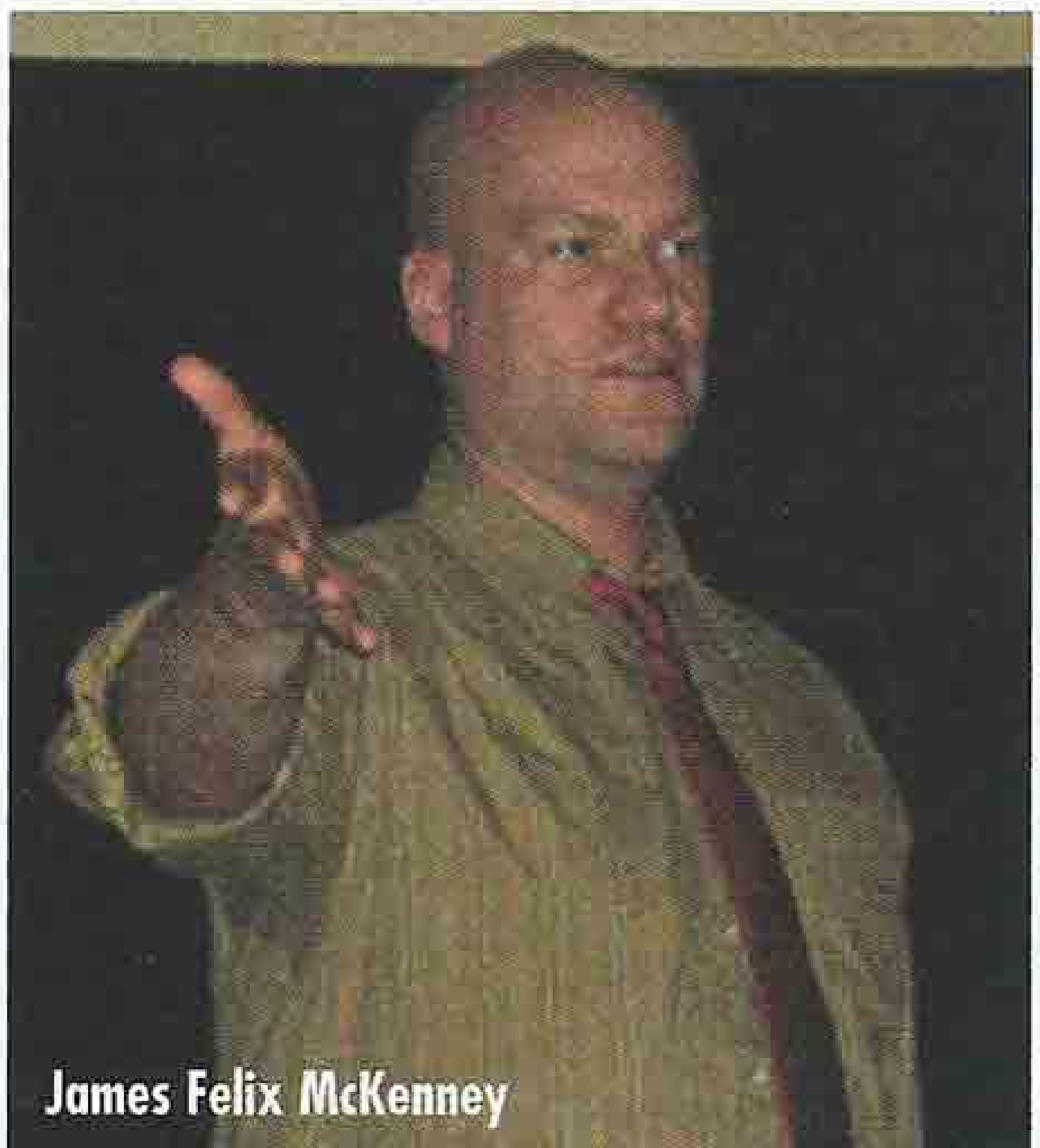

David Gregory (with Lynn Lowry)

Photo: Courtesy David Gregory

Oderus Urungus

Jovanka Vuckovic


James Felix McKenney

pointment, having romanticized something that wasn't really that good after all. This is not the case with *Monkey Shines*. It's not as good as it was—it's better.

David Gregory, director/producer: "*Dawn of the Dead* was the first movie I owned on VHS—the French version, because most of the glorious gore was cut from the UK release. It was my favorite film during my teens, and could well be the movie I've seen more than any other. It was also my first Romero, and from then on I wanted to see everything he had ever done or would ever do. With the exception of the elusive *There's Always Vanilla*, I owned and savored every one of his features in that glorious VHS-collecting era, and still have 'em.

"When George came to the Blue Underground office during the production of the *Crazies* DVD, a co-worker and I discussed how formatively inspiring *Dawn* was to me, and *Night* to my American colleague of a similar age; we briefly debated the accessibility of *Night* on late-night TV in the U.S. vs. tape only in the UK. George seemed baffled at the importance we were placing on these movies. It was hard to explain without looking like grinning worshippers in the presence of greatness...because that's what it was."

Oderus Urungus, GWAR: "There is no artist, period, who even comes close to the impact that George A. Romero had on me. I first saw *Night of the Living Dead* late one night on the Washington, DC weekly horror showcase *Creature Feature*, featuring host Count Gore De Vol. I was only about 10, and had never heard of the film before. When Barbra discovered the half-eaten corpse at the top of the stairs, it scared the living shit out of me. For years after, I dreaded that scene, but had to watch it every time the movie was on.

"By the time Romero served up *Dawn of the Dead*, I was a full-on horrorphile, but still needed a fake ID to get into the movie. The effect of *Dawn* on my art and how it led to the creation of GWAR is unmistakable. George A. Romero gave us modern cinematic horror, and added color, chaos and lotsa laughs. Without that there is no GWAR, no tons of other things. As far as I'm concerned, for the scope of his vision, and the impact his work has had on people's lives, George A. Romero is the biggest name in horror history."

Jovanka Vuckovic, filmmaker/author: "What can I say about George A. Romero that hasn't already been said? Yes, he's the godfather of modern zombie cinema. Even though he freely admits stealing the idea from Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*, he made the story his own and altered the landscape of the horror film forever back in '68. He is, however, much more than the sum of his zombie films, even though *Day of the Dead* remains one of my all-time favorites. Where would we horror fans be without *Martin*, *Creepshow* or *The Crazies*?

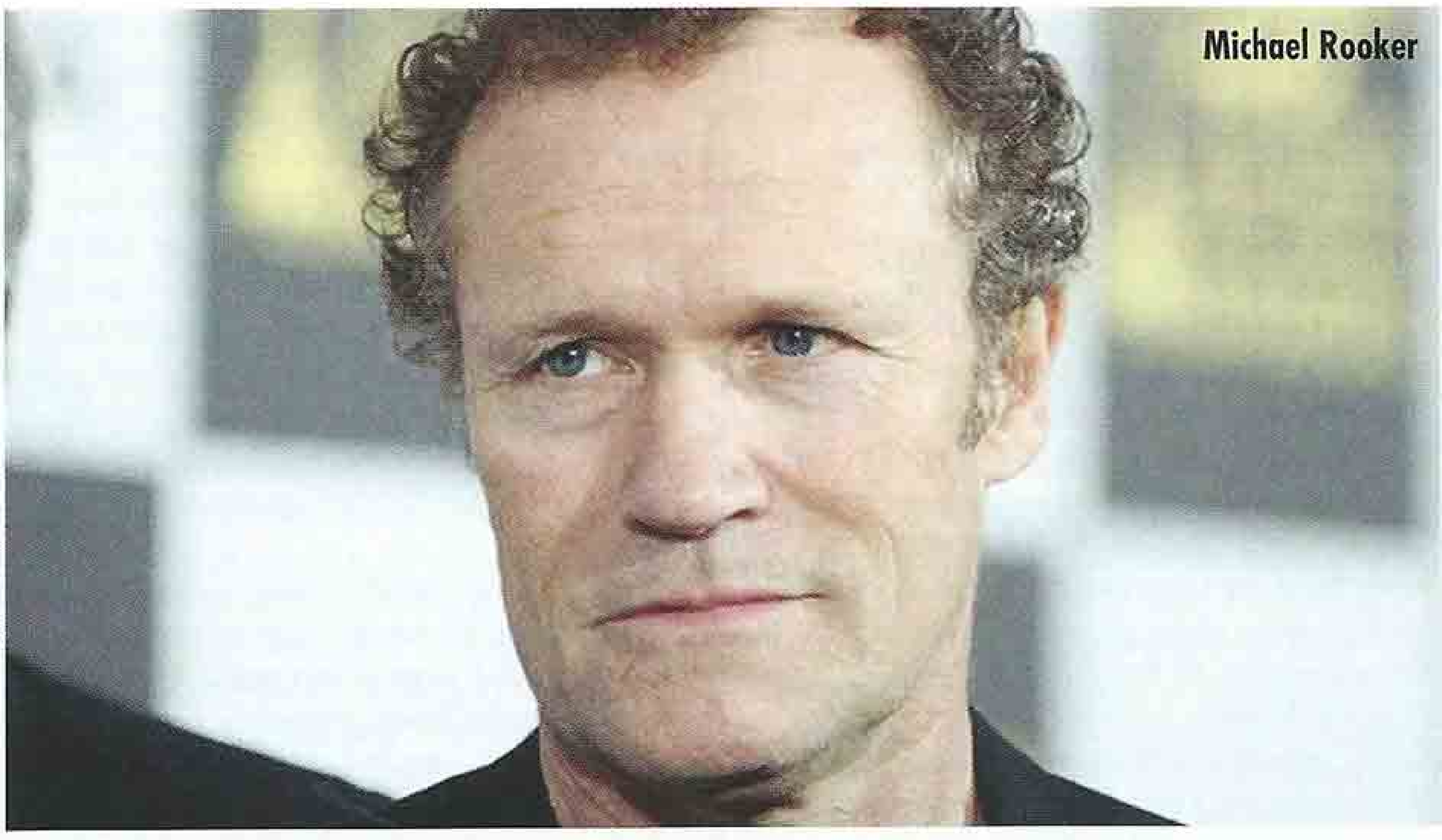
"George is a true original who embodies the spirit of independent filmmaking. He's a team-effort kind of guy who isn't afraid to share ideas or ask a PA what he or she thinks of a shot on set. He's honest, generous and unpretentious. He smokes, he drinks, he curses and above all, he tells great f**king stories—both on and off-camera. Thanks for all the nightmares, Uncle George!

James Felix McKenney, director: "My favorite Romero is a tie between *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead*. I think *Dawn* probably had more of an influence on me, in the sense of that mixture of humor and horror and satire—which is why I really like that movie. But of course, *Night of the Living Dead* is amazing. It's a perfect film, and I love the look of it. The thing I really like about Romero is the fact that his movies were so identified with Pittsburgh. He wasn't in New York, he wasn't in Hollywood, and I just love movies that aren't made in a 'film city.' Romero made Pittsburgh a film city; he made it *his* film city.

"I always say that when I made *Automatons*, it was a tribute to me as a kid growing up in the middle of the woods in Maine, and not having cable or anything like that, and staying up all night watching movies on my little black-and-white TV with a coat hanger for an antenna, trying to get these stations we could barely receive. Most of the movies were usually the Universal horror films or Hitchcock, but I remember that the first time I saw *Night of the Living Dead* was at 1 in the morning on the public TV station up in Maine, and I remember being so excited. We were barely able to get it in, and there were so many dots, but it was *Night of the Living Dead* in the middle of the night!"

Tim League, Alamo Drafthouse: "As with many folks around my age, *Dawn of the Dead* was a seminal movie for me. I distinctly remember renting and watching the film with my buddies during the burgeoning mom-and-pop video-store era of the early 1980s. We were 13 years old, but the clerk didn't give a damn how old we were or what we rented. With the barn doors open, that summer we systematically rented every R-rated movie with sex and/or violence, and watched them back to back in our own private, curated late-night movie marathons. We'd usually go over to my pal Tony's house. Like that video-store clerk, his folks didn't care one bit what we watched, and his dad would even join us from time to time for some of the T&A spectrum of our R-rated rentals.

"The mood in Tony's living room was electric after we watched *Dawn* for the first time. We continued to talk about it for weeks. To us, it was the perfect movie; everything about it was just so damn


Michael Rooker

cool. I was growing up in southeast Ohio, about 60 miles from Pittsburgh. Before the next school year started, I made my mom take me shopping at the Monroeville Mall. I kept the true motivation for the trip secret: I really just wanted to wander those hallowed halls.

"George A. Romero jumpstarted my obsession with cool movies. I didn't realize until much later that I could make a career out of it, but the obsession began back in the '80s with that VHS tape of *Dawn of the Dead*. For that, I am eternally grateful to him.

Michael Rooker, actor: "I've worked with George twice now, on *The Dark Half* and my game *Call of the Dead*, and both times have been really awesome. On *The Dark Half*, he was absolutely great, and in *Call*, he played George Romero, the director; I played myself and he played himself. We did motion-capture, and it was a lot of fun."

Rick Catizone, animator: "It has been a great privilege to know George, to work with him and to call him friend. George A. Romero, the innovative maverick in commercials who sparked a whole film genre, and has become a genuine legend. I met George shortly before I worked with him on the original *Night of the Living Dead*, and was fortunate to be able to contribute animation design and production, as well as some ancillary effects, for *Creepshow*, *Creepshow 2* and *The Dark Half*.

"I saw George on almost a daily basis at times, as our studios were in the same location for many years. He always had time, or made time, to say hi or chat. He was probably one of the most unassuming, genuine guys who never changed, even after all the success he has had. I can't think of anything greater to say about a man: extremely talented and extremely genuine.

Dave Alexander, editor-in-chief, *Rue Morgue*: "If you had any suspicions that George A. Romero had softened with age, look no further than the brilliant opening shot of *Land of the Dead* for proof that he's—to talk zombie—as *biting* as ever. The film opens on a grubby diner sign that reads 'EATS'—and points in the direction of the city, we'll soon learn…har har; as the crane shot continues down, we see weeds snarled around white picket fences, a zombie walking aimlessly with a briefcase, more dead wandering up the steps of a once-idyllic church, a particularly rotten rotter opening her mouth as if to speak and the town bandstand hosting a grey-skinned three-piece band spastically wringing sour notes from their tarnished instruments.

"In a single shot, the filmmaker not only cheekily foreshadows the plot with that sign, informs us that considerable time has passed since the apocalypse and reveals that the dead have evolved into something like a shadow society of their former lives, but also takes that Norman Rockwell vision of the good ol' U.S. of A.—the quaint fences, the park, the church, the bandstand—and renders it absolutely rotten.

"Subtle *Land of the Dead* ain't, from obvious metaphors to some cartoonish characters—Riley's dumb-as-nails sidekick Charlie, in particular—to the plot of let's-leave-the-city-for-the-safe-haven-of-Canada. But this approach also makes the film important. While two other high-profile horror films released within a year of *Land*—Eli Roth's *Hostel* and Rob Zombie's *The Devil's Rejects*—have been described by some critics as metaphors for a post-9/11 world, only Romero, a self-described hippie, had the guts, balls and boiling blood to make a bold political statement about it. In the reactionary post-9/11 era, Romero is alive and kicking harder than ever."

Kate and Laura Mulleavy, Rodarte clothing designers: "George A. Romero's films, specifically *Night of the Living Dead*, are among our favorites of all time. Our work was deeply impacted by that movie's aesthetics, and thematically, we were affected by how it—and all of George's work—echoes the cultural and sociopolitical reality of the time."

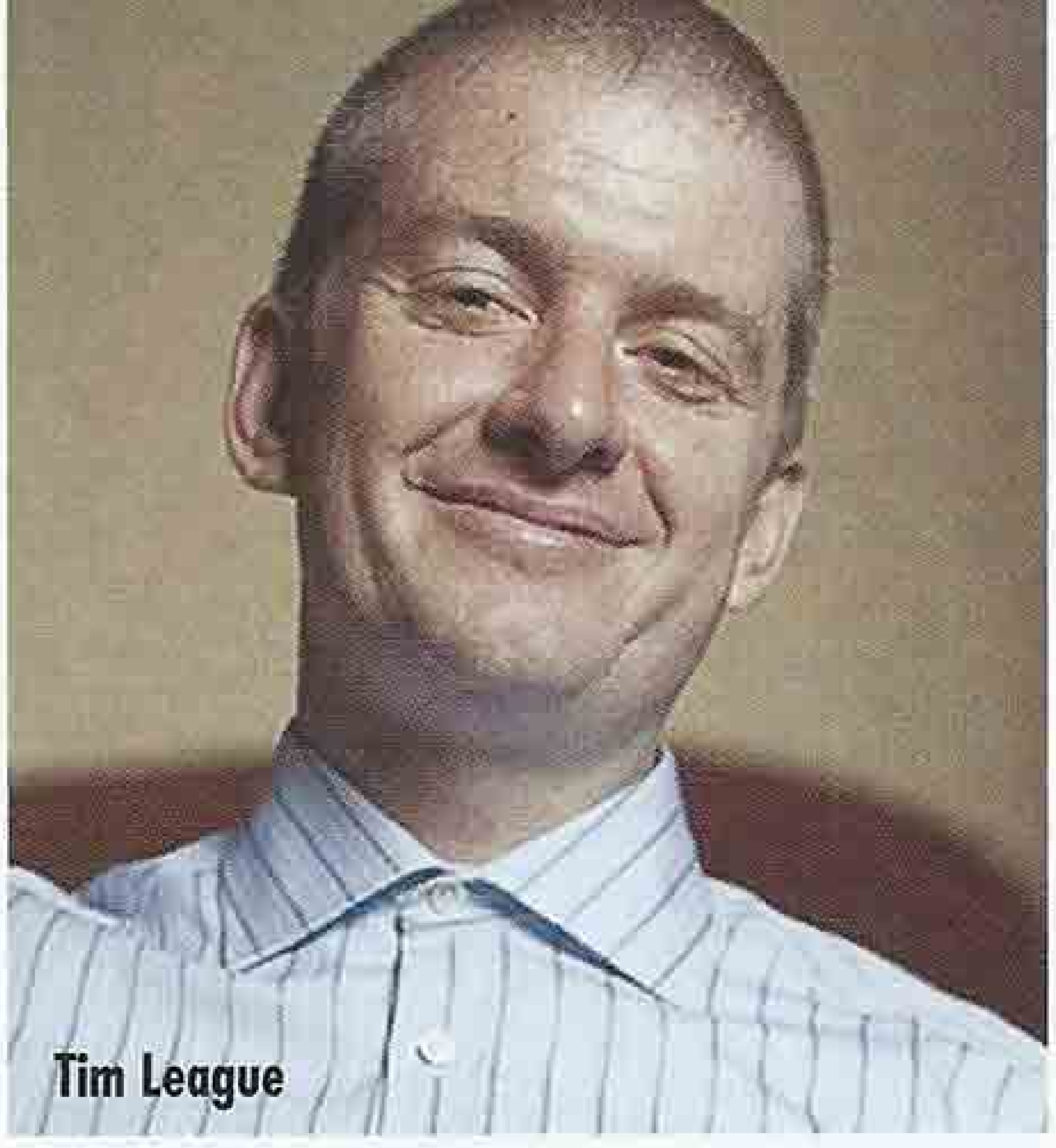

Tim League

Photo: Copyright Alamo Drafthouse

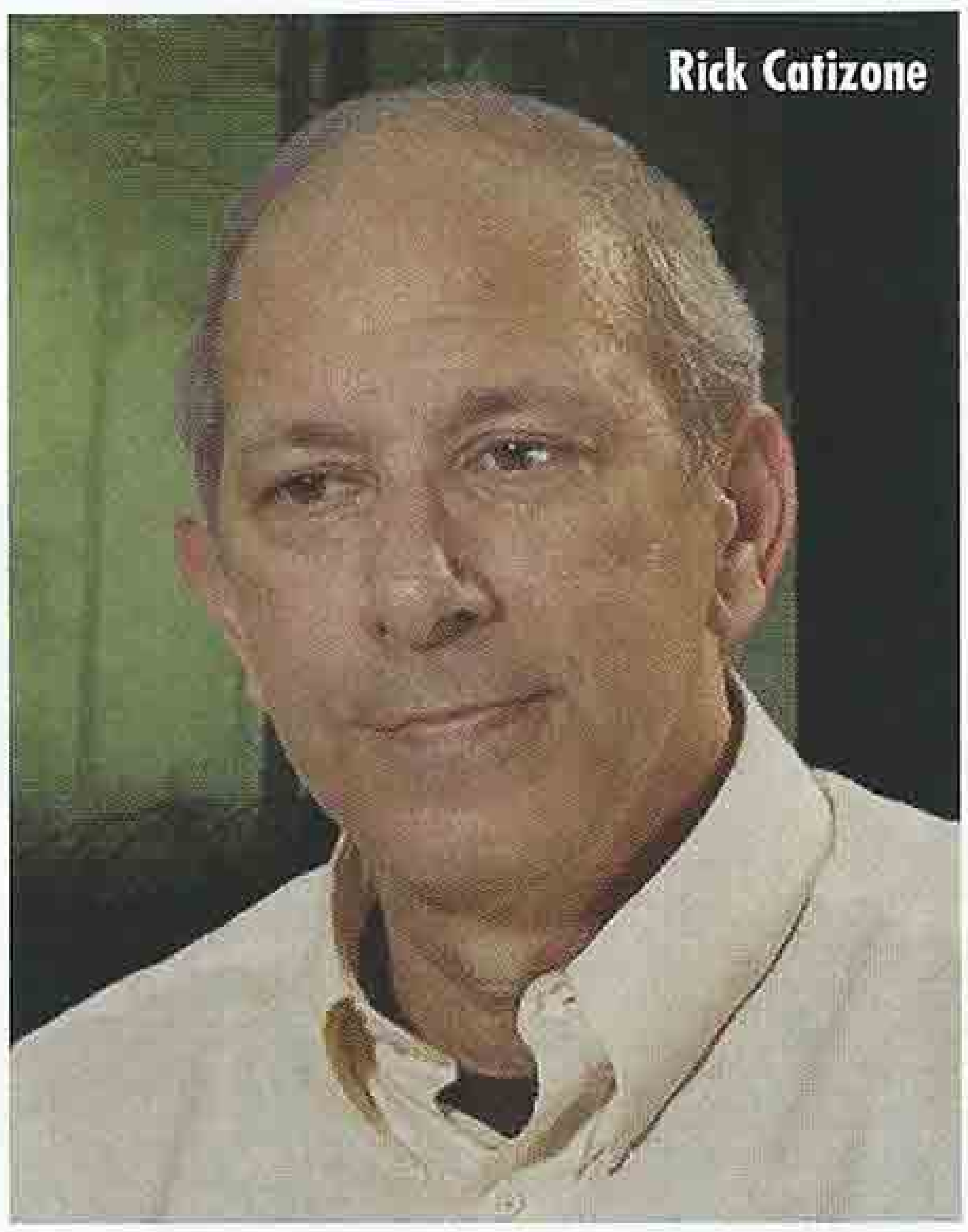

Rick Catizone

Photo: Copyright Red Shirt Pictures

Dave Alexander

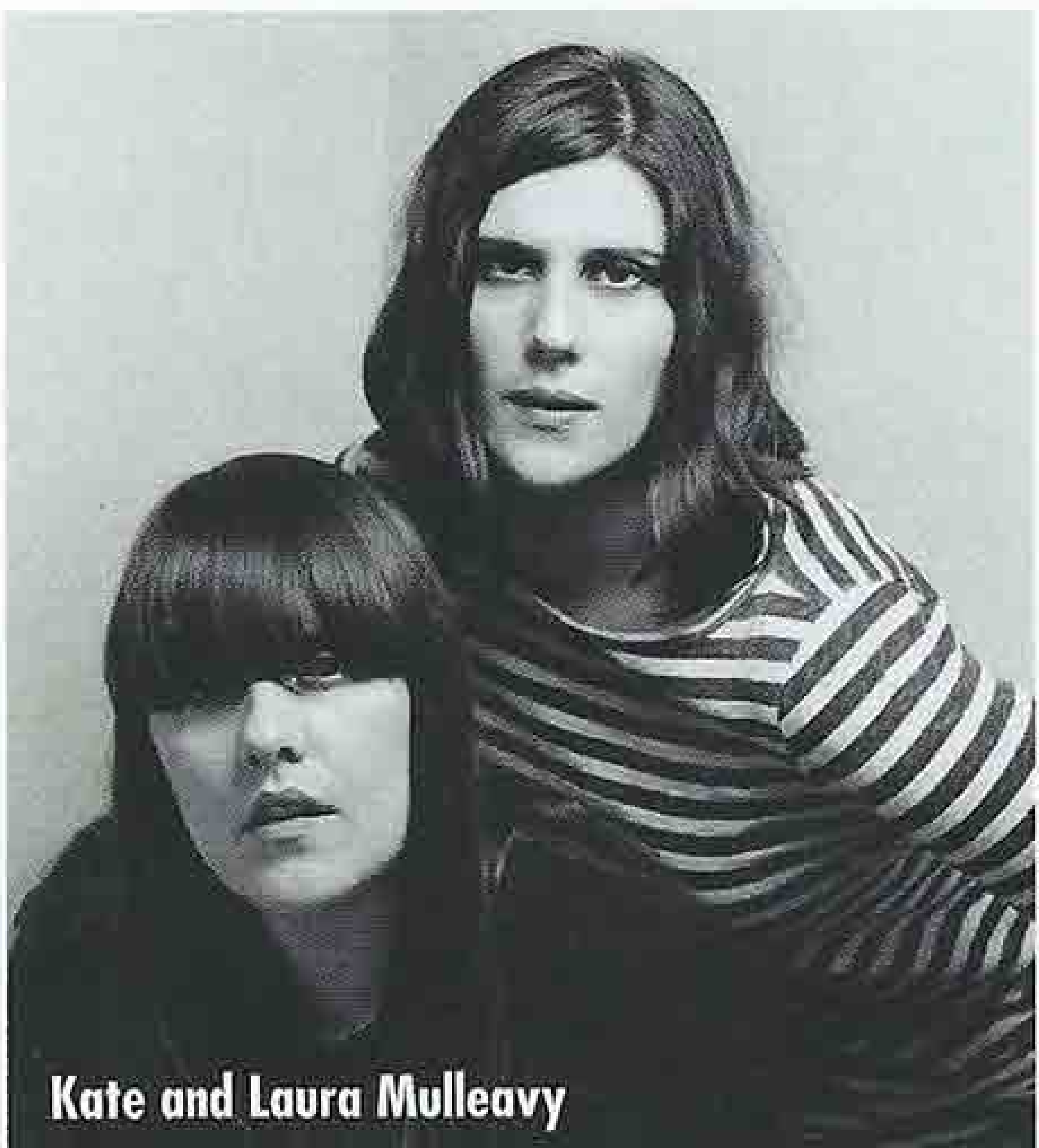
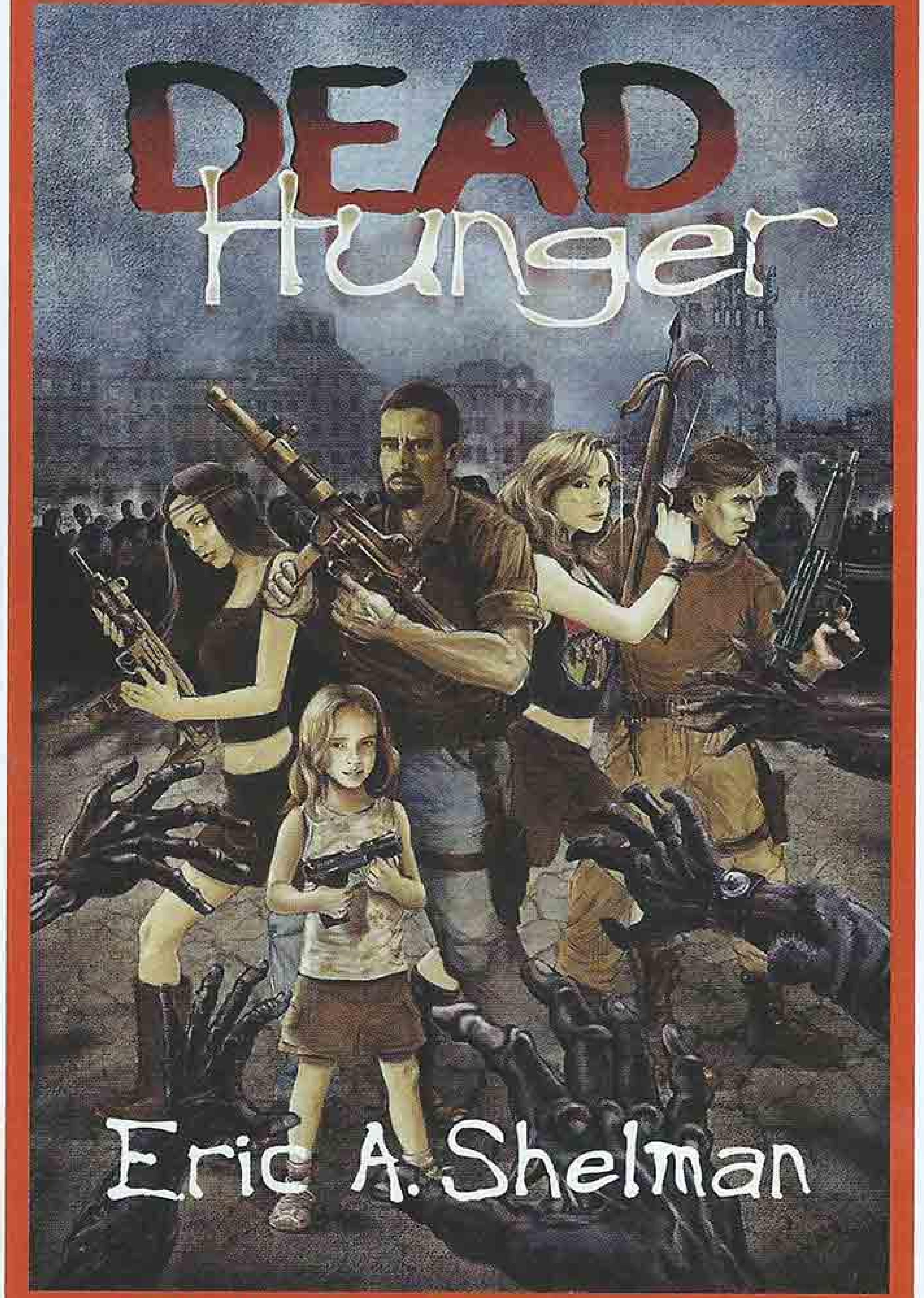

Kate and Laura Mulleavy

Photo: Courtesy Kate and Laura Mulleavy



BOOK ONE OF A FRIGHTENING NEW SERIES BY AUTHOR ERIC. A. SHELMAN

An epidemic turning humans into zombies has infected the population of the southeast United States and quite possibly the world, and Flex Sheridan doesn't like it one bit.

In an attempt to save his infected sister, Flex joins together with his former girlfriend Gem, and soon adds more people to his small band of survivors. Meet Flex, Gem, Charlie, Hemp and little Trina as they search for a cure while trying to survive in this terrifying new world.

Using Hemp's mobile lab and workshop and a host of high-powered weapons, they take on the walking dead, who have more ingenuity and abilities than any one of them believed possible.

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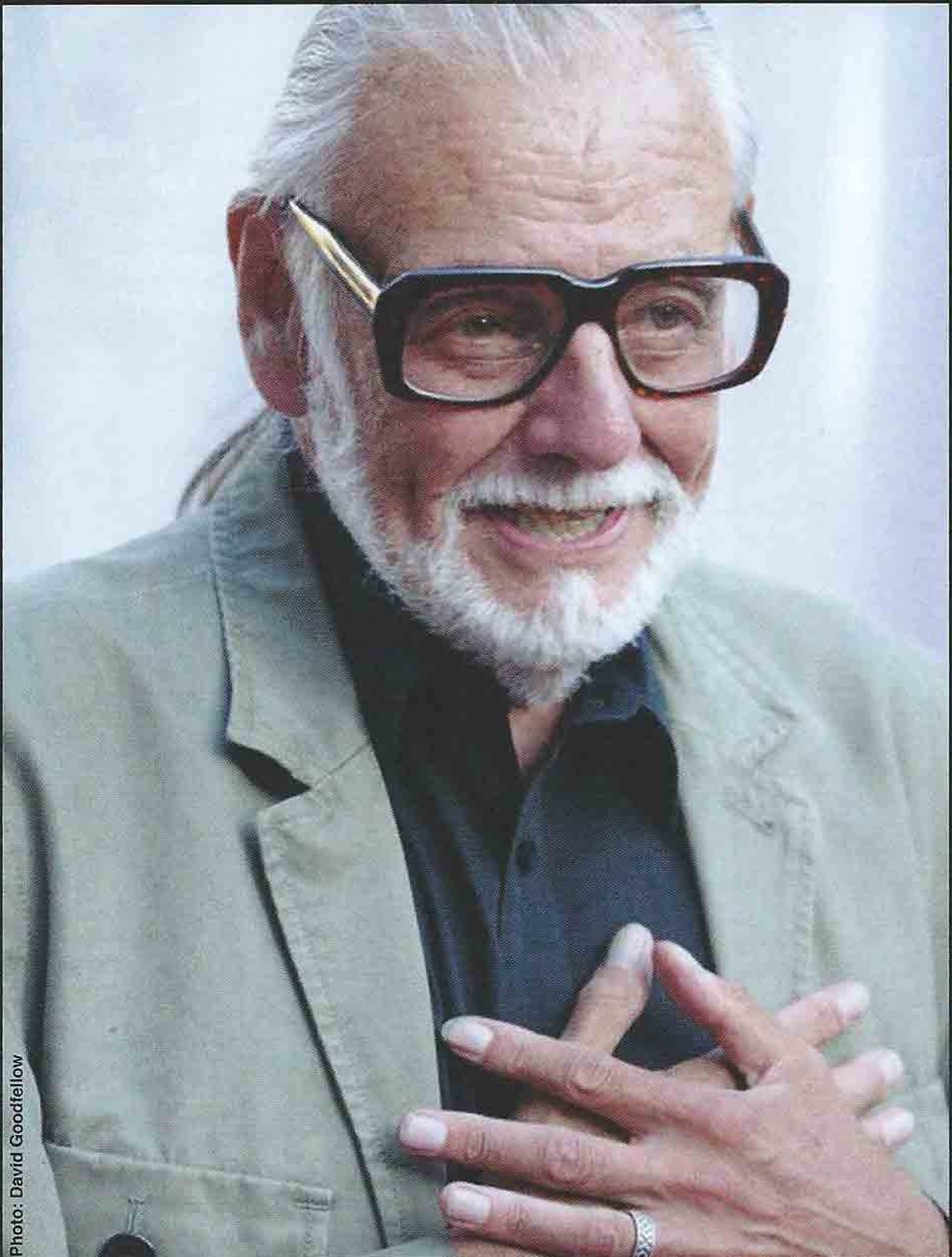
ROMERO'S NEW DAWN

As we firmly settle into another decade on this mysterious, spinning ball called planet Earth, it's nice to know that George A. Romero is still with us, in every sense of the word. As he gears up for a new wave of projects that include films, books and works of other macabre media, FANGORIA visited his Toronto home to talk not about his catalogued past but of his present, future and the state of the industry he has devoted his adult life to. Much like the tireless ghouls he gave all of us devoted fans, the man himself never stops moving, adapting and evolving.

FANGORIA: You have the reputation of being such a humble guy, despite the iconic status people hold you to. Are you comfortable with how the world perceives you at this stage of your life?
GEORGE A. ROMERO: Of course; really, what's not to be comfortable about? It's been great, my life has been great. As far as the films are concerned, a few more are coming down the pike, and I'm working on a couple now that look really good.
FANG: You mentioned to us once that you really just want to make your *Red Balloon*; are you ever going to make that pseudo-art-house drama you dream of?
ROMERO: I dunno, man, I dunno. If I could just find the money, I would definitely try to do it. But I just don't have the energy for the chase—for the money chase, you know? That's the big problem. I ran out of energy for that angle. You never get a platinum card in this business. Will I ever find that angel who says, "Here's a million bucks, George! Go do whatever the hell you want"? I don't know, but I know I'm not going to chase it. The path of least resistance is to stick with the genre stuff, and that's fine with me.
FANG: You've remarked that your last few *Dead* films have been a little heavier with melancholy. Are you finding some late-in-life religion, or spirituality?
ROMERO: Not really. I have a different spirituality, I think—something I've had for a while. A collective subconscious. I have sincere hope that maybe there is some sort of mass goodness in this world, something that is paying attention to what we do and that somehow, some way, we're earning points on someone's gigantic frequent-flyer plan!
FANG: How about politics, an interest that has informed so much of the work? Which side do you fall on these days, right or left?
ROMERO: Well, I believe any reasonable person falls somewhere in the middle. I don't think either extreme, either far right or far left, is any good or sensible way to live. Now, I live in Canada today, but I'm not up to speed on Canadian politics; I still follow American politics. I'm a huge CNN addict, and it's a bit masochistic because I really can't stand it, it's all so damn partisan. But for me, no, extremes never make any sense. And you know what's interesting? I genuinely have not liked Republicans ever, but to me Ron Paul is actually the only reasonable guy in this new crop.
FANG: This time next year, cinema as you have known it—the use and exhibition of celluloid—will pretty much be phased out entirely. How do you feel about this total changing of the guard?
ROMERO: I think it's sad. I don't know what else to say about the death of film except that it's sad. It's sad in the way it's sad to see a venerable old building go down. But it's a new day. It probably won't affect too much how films are being distributed, except it will maybe make it cheaper, and so I suppose on that level there's maybe some reason for hope. But I am very sad to see it all go away. You know, Turner has this film festival where they show all these great movies at the old Hollywood palaces. Those incredible places' days might be numbered, so I'm seriously thinking of going because today, there just isn't anything like that moviegoing experience anymore.
FANG: 2011 was a busy year for you personally…
ROMERO: It sure was. I took some time off, traveled Europe, got married…and I even quit smoking! You know, I'm a little slower these days, but I never stop being busy. I'm actually working on this new comic book with Marvel…maybe I'm not supposed to be saying that. But it's happening. And there's this incredible novel called *The Zombie Autopsies* by Steve Schlozman that I'm working on adapting with my partner Peter Grunwald. So stay tuned, there's much more to come…

—*Chris Alexander*



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